With The Merry Austrians

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BY AMY McLAREN

Bawbee Jock

The Yoke of Silence

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WITH THE MERRY AUSTRIANS

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CHAPTER I

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF A PINK BALLOON

THERE was the hurried patter of little bare feet in swift flight over the uncarpeted boards of the wooden corridor; a succession of bumpy jumps down the steps leading to the verandah; and a flying figure hurled itself against the legs of a tall man who was advancing in the opposite direction.

"English!" murmured the tall man, brought to an abrupt standstill, and looking down at a round object which reached no higher than his knee.

"Hulloa!" he said. "What are you? A pink balloon, eh?"

The runaway stopped short and stood with his hands behind his back: a little boy in a voluminous suit of pink pyjamas. They were

tied round his ankles with strings of white tape, and gave to his figure a peculiarly inflated appearance.

"A pink balloon," repeated the tall man. "I believe if I stuck a pin into you you 'd go pop."

A peal of shrill laughter greeted this pleasantry. To the intelligence of three it sounded very funny.

"No, I would n't go pop, 'cos I could n't. I 'm not a balloon. I 'm a little boy. I 'm Benjie."

Mr. Egerton bent down and scanned critically the small face upturned to his.

"Oh, you 're a little Benjamin, are you? Where are all your brothers and sisters?"

The small person in the pink pyjamas wriggled his bare toes backwards and forwards over the wooden flooring.

"I have n't got none," he said slowly. "I 've only got a muvver and—I 've runned away. Here she comes!" he exclaimed hurriedly. "You hide me, quick!"

Mr. Egerton was not given time to remonstrate against the use to which his person was put. The balloon-like object suddenly disappeared. The next moment he felt a pair of firm little hands clasping the calves

of his legs from behind, with cat-like tenacity.

From the distant corridor came a voice, clear and sweet.

"Benjie! Benjie! come back! How dare you run away!"

Mr. Egerton looked up.

She was a very youthful mother: a mere girl. She was tall and slight. There was an air of freshness and supple grace in the lines of her figure, as she ran lightly down the verandah steps.

His position was an awkward one. He could not free himself. He had to stand still and wait for developments.

The girl's step slackened as she drew near. The evening light, flickering through the creepers which hung from the arch above, cast flecks of colour on her white dress, and touched her hair, which was golden brown, and soft and thick. He was conscious of a pair of eyes fixed on him enquiringly. Under the dark lashes he could not see whether they were blue or grey or hazel. Nor could he tell whether she was laughing at him, or whether she was serious. He took off his hat, and murmured something apologetic.

The girl bowed.

"Benjie," she said severely, "come here!"

The answer was a derisive flutter of the pink pyjamas.

She took a step forward.

With a piercing scream Benjie released his grasp, and, kicking up his heels, fled down the verandah towards the open garden beyond.

Mr. Egerton stood aside and watched the two figures—the one flying, the other pursuing—until they disappeared. Ought he to follow and assist in the capture, he wondered, or might the lady resent his interference? He was not given to impulsive action, and he hesitated. At that moment a thin elderly man, wearing eyeglasses, appeared at the door leading into the corridor, and called to him in a harassed voice of appeal.

"Myles! I wish you would come here and look after the luggage. They are taking it into the wrong rooms, and I can't make this crop-headed idiot of a foreigner understand a word I say."

"All right, I 'm coming."

"And I 've written our names in the Visitors' Book," called out the same voice.

"The dickens you have!" murmured Mr. Egerton. "Exactly what I did not want you to do."

The pursuit of the runaway was short but animated. He was caught in a summer house at the foot of the garden, and was scolded and conducted up-stairs to his nursery, protesting and unrepentant.

"I wonder what that gentleman thought of you," said his mother, as she tucked the bedclothes round him. "He must have been shocked. Now, say you 're sorry before going to sleep."

"He spoked English. I knewed what he said," remarked Benjie, evading a direct reply.

"Say you 're sorry," repeated his mother.

Benjie's gaze travelled upwards, and he began to count the flies crawling over the low ceiling. An admonitory shake interrupted his calculations. His eyes roamed round the room in search of something.

"I want Curly Kate," he said. "I can't go to sleep wivout Curly Kate."

On a table, where it was lying face downwards, was a black doll. A halo of hair stood out from its battered head; it had never been beautiful, but a smile of content crept over Benjie's features as it was laid to sleep on the pillow beside him.

"Kiss Curly Kate, muvver," he said drowsily.

"You have n't said you 're sorry yet for running away."

With a sudden gesture Benjie threw out his arms and clasped them round his mother's neck. He drew her head down close to his.

"You 're so pretty, muvver," he whispered coaxingly. "Such a pretty, pretty muvver." He pressed two fingers against the curve of her cheek, and the colour flushed up warm and soft. "And you 're so nice to kiss, muvver," continued the wheedling voice. "Your cheeks smells so nice. They smells dust like pink soap."

A shower of kisses and scoldings descended on his head.

"I sink I 'm sorry now," he murmured. The languor of sleep weighed heavy on his eyelids. "I sink I 'm sorry," he repeated drowsily, and, turning on his side, he laid his cheek against Curly Kate's dusky locks.

She watched him sleeping, her glance wandering occasionally round the bare little nursery. It was the bedroom of a primitive summer hotel in the Austrian Tyrol. The wooden floor was innocent of carpet, the furniture scanty and of the plainest description. The only adornments on the blue-washed walls were a hanging mirror. and a

crude-coloured print of the Holy Family. Yet there was redemption in its immaculate cleanliness: in the quaintly-shaped windows, iron-barred and muslin-curtained, through which could be seen distant glimpses of mountain and pine forest bathed in the golden light of evening.

An open door showed the adjoining room to be as plain and simple, but it led on to a small wooden balcony. A table was drawn up to the window, and on it were a few photographs, a glass of wild flowers, and a piece of work thrown hastily down, small refining signs of a woman's presence.

Rose Trevor turned her head as a step sounded in the corridor. The door opened, and a young girl dressed in peasant costume entered with an elaborate attempt at noiselessness.

Leopoldina's thick flaxen hair was braided in two plaits, which met over her brow, and were tucked away behind her ears. Her sturdy figure gave the impression that she wore a great many petticoats and her breadth was accentuated by the well-starched whiteness of her cotton sleeves, tied above her elbows with cherry-coloured ribbons. She was breathing heavily: the result of running

upstairs after a generous supper. She glanced at her sleeping charge, and then at her mistress, who spoke to her in a low tone in German, and gave her some instructions.

Mrs. Trevor passed from the nursery into the room beyond, and stepping out on to the balcony leant her arms on the wooden rail and looked down into the garden below.

"I 'm glad I came here. It 's a dear old place," she murmured.

An atmosphere of by-gone pride, of old-world romance, made it almost a sin to call Schloss Waldhof an hotel. Many such old Schlosses abound in the Austrian Tyrol. Many are allowed to crumble into ruins, but Schloss Waldhof had fired the imagination of an enterprising hotel proprietor. He had bought it and turned it to its present use. He had based his hopes of success not on the rustic beauty of its surroundings but on the proximity of a mineral spring. A Wasser Kur would draw visitors to the place. The Schloss he had wisely left alone, but he had built a row of very ugly bath-houses, disfigured the fine old entrance by placing over it a gaudy boarding on which was inscribed "Hotel Pension Schloss Waldhof," and erected a blatantly modern restaurant in a separate part of the garden.

On the restaurant he built his best hopes. The cuisine was excellent, the wine and beer more than ordinarily good. It was open to the public as well as to the inmates of the Schloss, and was much frequented by the officers of the different regiments at present camping in the neighbourhood for the summer manœuvres.

From her balcony Rose looked across at the pine woods and drew in a deep breath of the cool air which was stealing over the valley with the lengthening shadows.

"I will have supper now, and go for a walk afterwards," she decided, and made her way down-stairs and passed out through the front entrance.

Crossing a courtyard paved with white cobble stones, she mounted a flight of steps leading to the restaurant and entered the Speise Saal. It was a big cool room, with many windows overlooking the garden. A long table ran down one side of it, and numerous small tables were dotted about for the use of outside visitors.

Being a resident at the Schloss, she took her place at the long table. Opposite to her sat an enormously fat woman who looked up from her plate and bowed.

"Goot evenink," she said.

She spoke thickly. She had beady black eyes and a hooked nose. There was no mistaking Frau Wolff's nationality.

"Good evening," answered Rose, politely.

Her acquaintance with Frau Wolff had so far not gone beyond the stage of bowing at meals, but Frau Wolff never missed an opportunity of talking if it came in her way.

"I haf inclination to speak Ingleesh," she said, "but I haf not much occasion."

Frau Wolff had finished her supper. A slender-necked bottle of white wine stood beside her plate. It was a little more than half empty. She had already drunk more than her allowed portion, and she sighed heavily.

"Ze Kur," she said, in a depressed voice, "I do ze Kur. I must not drink more of ze vine."

Rose regarded her compassionately. Would any amount of curing ever reduce that mountain of flesh to reasonable limits? Self-denial seemed a work of supererogation. She was a heaving, billowy mass of fat. Her head looked absurdly small for her body. The hair was drawn up to the crown in a tight knot which nodded over her forehead when she became excited.

"Would the wine really hurt you?"

"It is vengeance to ze stōmach." Frau Wolff folded her hands over that portion of her person which lay below the waistband. "If I drink ze vine, zen I haf such remorses."

"Nearly every one here drinks beer," said Rose.

The top knot above Frau Wolff's brow quivered.

"Beer! I am a ruffian for ze beer." She drew in her lips tightly, and her bosom rose and fell. "But ze Kur. I do ze Kur."

Marie, the pretty Tyrolean who was waiting on them, brought in Rose's supper.

Frau Wolff watched attentively. Although she had finished she did not seem inclined to go away. This was a good opportunity, she thought, for finding out a few particulars about the English lady.

"Of vat age is your leetle son?" she asked.

"He is three," answered Rose.

"Ah so! Are you veedow?"

Rose glanced up. She hesitated. The question was so very personal. Then she answered quietly: "Yes."

"For how long time haf you been veedow?"

Rose turned to give an order to Marie and pretended not to hear.

"For von year—or two year, or more zen two year?" continued the relentless voice. 'Vy haf you not married again? Vould you, vis an Austrian marry?"

Rose looked round despairingly. How could she get rid of this terrible woman? She was wondering whether she would be obliged to take refuge in flight when something occurred to divert Frau Wolff's attention.

CHAPTER II

FRAU WOLFF STIRS THE GOSSIP-POT

TWO ladies and a party of men had entered the Saal. All the men were in uniform, and the majority of them were young officers belonging to the Kaiser Jäger Regiment. They wore pale blue tunics and pearl grey trousers and little black jam-pot hats. There were also a couple of artillerymen in dark blue, and a young officer who evidently belonged to the staff. His General, a stout, elderly man with a row of medals across the breast of his tunic, was talking genially to the elder of the two ladies, who was evidently the mother of the younger.

Frau Wolff swung heavily round on her chair, and then swung back again.

"Ze Frau Baronin Seybell and ze young Baronin. Zey haf vis zem ze Herr General and much *offiziere*. Zey haf been playing—vat you calls tenees."

Frau Wolff worshipped rank and birth, but deep down in her heart she envied jealously these aristocrats. They treated her with contemptuous indifference. The young Baronin Seybell was the haughtiest and most contemptuous of them all, but that did not prevent Frau Wolff from taking a lively interest in all that the young Baronin did and said.

There was a clattering of swords as the men moved about hanging up their hats and overcoats on a row of pegs by the door. Before sitting down they clicked their heels together and saluted the occupants of the tables on either side.

"Ze young Baronin is elegānt, *nicht wahr?*" said Frau Wolff. "She is modērn. She is vat you Ingleesh calls smart. She pass you on ze stair vis a high head and no smile, no salutation. Zat is modērn—smart, you call it?"

Her words threw light on a subject which had puzzled Rose. The Seybells were neighbours of hers in the Schloss, but the young Baronin had shown none of the courtesy which foreigners usually extend to those with whom they are thrown in contact.

"Are those supposed to be smart manners?" she said. "How funny!"

"It is of a time for ze young Baronin to marry," continued Frau Wolff. "Ze years pass and she haf not already a husband. I find she looks for him vis a hungry eye."

Rose glanced across at the other table.

The young Baronin was strikingly handsome. She had brilliant dark eyes, a pale face, and very red lips. She talked a great deal with sparkling vivacity. Evidently what she said was amusing, to judge by the bursts of laughter which followed her sallies.

Frau Wolff made a grimace and spread out her hands.

"Zese *offiizere!* Zey make nodding. Zey haf no moneys." Her voice sank to a lower key. "Zis evenink a gentleman of your country has arrived. He is frient to ze young Baronin. I see zem meets. She vas full of happiness. She put all her heart into her eyes and she look at him so!"

Frau Wolff's imitation of Vilma Seybell's expression was more suggestive than flattering. With the help of a pair of opera glasses, which she always kept ready on her balcony table, she was accustomed to watch everything that went on in the hotel.

"Yes, I saw zeir meetings," she repeated, wagging her head. "It is not of ze first time.

Ze Ingleesh Herr has vis him a frient who takes ze Kur. I hear him enquire for ze bass."

The room was filling rapidly, and as Rose had finished her supper, she thought it better to go before Frau Wolff could again revert to personalities. She laid her table napkin beside her plate and rose.

Frau Wolff was not an easy person to shake off.

"You go?" she said, raising herself out of her chair with difficulty. "I too."

But on the doorstep Rose made a determined stand.

"I am going for a walk," she said politely. "Good evening"; and before Frau Wolff could collect sufficient English to explain that she wished to come with her, she had crossed the courtyard, and passing through the gateway had taken the path which led in the direction of the Kastanienwald.

The sun had dipped behind the range of hills which rose at the back of the Schloss, and the shadows were creeping over vineyard and orchard. A faint breeze, laden with sweet scents, rose from the valley where all day long the peasants had toiled in the burning sun, tossing and turning the new-mown hay.

Once out of reach of Frau Wolff, Rose

walked leisurely, and the air blew softly on her bare head and ruffled the little waves of hair behind her ears. Presently she wandered from the beaten track and penetrated deeper into the forest. Here the trees stood wider apart, their gnarled limbs clothed in the fresh green of early summer, the mossy turf about their spreading roots thickly strewn with the prickly husks of last year's harvest.

A wayside shrine marked the spot where two ways met. She never passed the shrine without stepping for a few minutes across its threshold. Crude pictures in blue and gold covered the whitewashed walls. Garlands of paper roses and faded tinsel were laid before the lace-draped altar. Little tokens of the emotional peasant fervour which finds its outlet in votive offering were strewn everywhere.

The light was beginning to fade and the forest was lonely at that hour. She was hesitating as to whether she would go on farther or retrace her steps, when she heard the sound of voices, and she drew back into the doorway of the shrine. She would allow whoever it was to pass on, she thought.

From where she stood she caught a glimpse of two men coming up the path. One was the Englishman whom she had seen that

afternoon on the verandah. His companion would be the friend who had come to Waldhof to take the Wasser Kur, she concluded.

They passed on the other side of the shrine, but only went on for a short distance and turned back. As they came within earshot again, one of them stopped and struck a match. She heard him trying to light his pipe. There were muttered exclamations regarding the villainous badness of foreign matches, and then a whiff of tobacco smoke was wafted round to where she stood, and an interrupted conversation was continued.

"And, Charles, don't put your foot in it and give me away. Hotels are such gossipy places, and I 'm not going to have any fuss."

She was quite sure it was Benjie's new friend, the tall Englishman, who spoke, because the answer came in a prim staccato voice which could not be his. Rather a huffy answer:

"My dear Myles, I have no wish to interfere with your plans. Whilst I am here I shall adhere rigidly to the cure. It is my intention to avoid society entirely, so you may——"

The remainder of the sentence was lost as the two men passed on.

Rose waited until they were out of sight

before moving. She was annoyed at having played eavesdropper, but the situation had been sprung upon her unawares. She could not help thinking over the conversation as she walked homewards. Of course it had reference to the young Baronin Seybell.

"And he does not understand her at all. She would like the fuss and gossip."

Sounds of music greeted her as she turned in at the garden entrance to the Schloss, and she saw that lights were streaming from the windows of the Lese Saal. The darkness had fallen quickly, and in contrast to the outer gloom, the brightly lit window appeared like a picture framing the group of figures within.

It showed a bare, sparsely furnished room, panelled in light varnished wood. The tables and chairs had been pushed aside, and one of the young Kaiser Jägers was seated at the piano. He was playing a *pas de quatre.* His fingers rattled up and down the keyboard, and he improvised startling variations as he went along.

Vilma Seybell and her mother were there, with their party. The old Baronin had been swept into a corner and Vilma was dancing. She was leading the procession with an officer

in a dark blue uniform, and the rest of the party, dancing in couples, followed behind her.

In order to reach her rooms Rose had to pass close to the open window. She saw the door of the Lese Saal open and the tall Englishman enter. Without a moment's hesitation Vilma dropped her partner's arm and hurried across the room to greet him.

Rose continued her way into the house and passed up the dimly lighted stairs.

The night was very warm and the door on to the balcony stood open. She pulled out a chair and sat down. Leaning her head back against the cushion she fixed her eyes on the myriads of little twinkling lights which looked down at her from the great blue vault above, and a wistful expression crept over her face.

Hitherto she had watched Vilma Seybell's small triumphs with indifference. Every evening the same thing went on: there was music and dancing, or impromptu entertainments were got up by the soldiers keen after a hard day's work for something on which to vent their high spirits. It had amused her to watch them. To-night she was conscious of a discordant note which jarred, and she wondered why. What had aroused in her a train of

memories which she did not wish to revive? Was it the sound of an English voice which she had not heard for so long? Or was it Frau Wolff's inquisitive questioning?

Frau Wolff had asked her if she was a widow? She was only twenty-five and she had been a widow for three years. Three years of lonely wanderings with only the child as her companion.

She moved her head restlessly, and a sigh escaped her.

"And always pinching and saving and calculating. It 's so sordid and dreary! What am I to do when he is n't a baby any longer? He 's getting big so dreadfully quick. And he wants such a lot, and I want to give him everything, and I can't. If I were to die, what would become of him?"

It haunted her like a nightmare—that future. What could she do for him? How could she make up to him for what he had lost? He had been so cruelly wronged. The innocent victim of an old man's tyranny and revenge. She could not give him back his lost birthright, and he had lost it through her. There lay the bitterness of the sting.

"I will not think of it—I dare not," she murmured.

Lights still streamed from the windows of the Lese Saal, but the dancing had ceased. A brooding stillness hung over the shadowy garden. Suddenly her attitude changed. She sat upright and listened intently.

The sound of a violin floated out on the still air. Plaintive, yearning: the trembling sweetness of the notes seemed to stretch out beseeching hands to her across the soft barrier of the night's darkness.

She knew every rise and fall of the melody. Its tender cadence, the entreaty of its appeal, strained her heart to positive pain. An agony of longing and wild regret swept over her.

She pressed her fingers against her throbbing temples as on and on floated the haunting refrain; now pulsing with subtle meaning, now pleading for love, now sobbing for broken dreams. It rose and fell and quivered on the scented air. Wafted this way and that, it laid its trembling burden of sweetness and sadness at her feet.

Scalding tears smarted under her closed eyelids. A passionate rebellion resolutely kept under broke from its control—she bowed her head on her clasped hands and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER III

VILMA SEYBELL INTERVENES

THE day had been hot—overpoweringly hot. So hot that to cross a patch of sunshine required concentration of purpose and an obvious necessity for getting to the other side. The lawn tennis court had been deserted all day, but now that the shadows were beginning to lengthen across its sun-baked surface, a little stir of life was noticeable in its vicinity.

The soldiers made a practice of coming up to Schloss Waldhof for lawn tennis after the day's work was done. They had their coffee in the shady garden and smoked and read the papers until it was cool enough to play. Then they gradually collected round the tennis court. They were very keen about their games, and they always scored in English. They began by bowing to their opponents across the net and saying "Zank you very much." They

shouted "Play-e-e" and "Ready-e-e" as often as they could, and reached a climax of enthusiasm when the game was "Love" and "Love all."

That afternoon it was certainly hotter than usual. The atmosphere was oppressive. To play tennis in a tight uniform with the thermometer standing at eighty in the shade was trying. Before long the benches at the end of the court were strewn with cuffs and swords and spurs and black jam-pot hats, and anything else that was detachable.

Vilma Seybell made her appearance as soon as she thought it was worth while. She considered she played tennis very well. She dashed about the court and threw herself into exaggerated attitudes; poached her partner's balls and missed her own. Her mother sat on one of the benches among the swords and hats and applauded timidly.

Rose Trevor was lying in a long basket chair under the shade of a chestnut tree. She could see the tennis court in the distance.

They were all there. Vilma and the stout General, who was the most enthusiastic player of them all, and a crowd of young officers, most of whom she knew by sight.

A book lay open on her lap, but every two

minutes her attention was claimed by Benjie, who was playing at keeping a chemist's shop beside her chair. He had turned his wheelbarrow upside down and was laying out on it neat little rows of powders and mud pies. His mother was gravely making her choice between a yellow powder and a brown one when a tennis ball, hit at random from the court, spun across the top of the wheelbarrow and scattered the chemist's shop to the winds.

Benjie hesitated for a moment and then went after it.

"You must send it back," said his mother, and he reluctantly obeyed.

His shot was not a good one. The ball only carried a few yards and landed in a patch of uncut grass. Clasping his hands behind his back and planting his legs very wide apart (which was his favourite attitude), he waited to see what would happen.

A minute later his voice rang out, shrill, and broken with peals of laughter.

"Oh, muvver, muvver, do look! Do look at the soldier man!"

Rose glanced round. One of the young officers was coming towards the child. He was performing a succession of Catherine wheels over the grass, and as he drew nearer he

turned a somersault and then stood still and saluted.

Benjie hugged his waistband and danced with delight. He ventured a step nearer and pointed to where the ball lay hidden.

The young man was slight and fair, and there was a suspicion of devilry in his blue eyes.

He picked up the ball and threw it gently towards Benjie, who sent it spinning back at his head.

Vilma Seybell's voice was heard calling from the tennis court.

"Herr Bar-on! Herr Baron!"

The young man paid no attention. He continued playing, and as the game was being carried on at the back of her chair, Rose did not feel that she was called upon to interfere.

"Herr Baron! Herr Baron Schölan!" cried Vilma, peremptorily.

"*Sacrament!*" muttered the young Baron, angrily. He glanced towards the basket chair, but there was nothing visible except the back view of a very pretty head. He tossed the ball up in the air, and, waving an adieu to Benjie, sauntered back to the tennis court.

Five minutes later the same thing happened again. The tennis balls seemed to have a

special aptitude for rolling in that direction. Rose began to suspect that it was not entirely accidental.

It was useless trying to recall Benjie to his powders and mud pies. Vilma Seybell became exasperated. She rushed after the ball herself on the next occasion, and when Benjie, with childlike confidence, went up to her with it in his hand, she snatched it from him and turned away without a word of thanks.

Rose flushed crimson. She sprang up and called the child to her.

"Come," she said shortly. "We will go for a walk. Odious woman!" she murmured vehemently to herself as she picked up her book.

But Benjie was loth to go.

"He 's looking at me, muvver," he pleaded, dragging the toes of his boots reluctantly over the grass and straining to look back over his shoulder. "I don't like walks. I like the soldier man."

Rose was unable to explain to him her reasons for taking him away. His friendliness to strangers was continually landing her in difficulties. She looked round in the hope of seeing something that might distract his attention.

"Listen!" she said. "I hear a whip being cracked. There 's a carriage coming. We 'll go and see the horses."

A dusty diligence, piled with luggage, drove in at the entrance to the courtyard of the Schloss. Its appearance was welcomed by a shout from the tennis court, and the General was seen hurrying across the stretch of grass towards it.

From the inside of the diligence stepped a dainty little lady, who laughed gaily and held out her hands towards him. She was quite young and she was exquisitely dressed. Diamonds twinkled in her pretty ears and a piquant face sparkled and dimpled from behind the folds of a long veil which was twisted round her hat and fell over her shoulders.

The General took her in his arms and kissed her loudly and repeatedly on either cheek. She was his "*Liebe Frau.*" He did not care who looked on and saw him do it. He gave some directions about the luggage to the driver of the diligence, and tucking his wife's hand under his arm, he carried her off to have coffee in the garden.

That evening after supper there was again music and dancing in the Lese Saal, but Vilma was not the centre of attraction. Her fickle

court clustered round the newcomer, who smiled on them all. Vilma was not even able to keep the Englishman to herself. As Rose passed through the garden on her return from her usual solitary ramble in the dusk, she caught a glimpse of him being presented to the General's wife, and Vilma was looking on.

The wooden boarding of Frau Wolff's balcony creaked loudly as she passed under it, and a thick whisper floated down from the darkness above.

"Ze Gräfin Rentier, who is ze wife of ze General, haf arrived. Ze Baronin Seybell regards her vis eyes of jealousy."

CHAPTER IV

GRÄFIN RENTIER "PRESENTS" THE ENGLISH LADY

THERE was tennis again the following afternoon, and Benjie could not understand why his mother would not sit in her usual place under the chestnut tree.

She always sat there. She had sat there yesterday, and yesterday had been a red-letter day in his calendar. He was woefully disappointed. He caught glimpses through the trees of blue-coated figures and the glitter of swords; it was unkind of his mother, and he could not understand it at all.

He leant disconsolately over the edge of the fountain in the garden, and splashed the water backwards and forwards with his stick.

"Take care," said his mother, "or you 'll tumble in," and she laid hold of him by the seat of his little white trousers.

Feeling himself secure, he leant over still

farther and splashed harder. He made so much noise that Rose was not aware that any one was near her, until she heard a voice at her elbow.

She pulled Benjie hastily back on to the grass.

The General's wife stood beside her. She held a tennis racquet in her hand, and was laughing at Benjie's round eyes of wonder. She turned to Rose, with a pretty air of appeal.

"I have come to ask if you will play tennis with us." She put her hands together, and added eagerly: "Do please say that you will come."

Rose drew back, taken by surprise.

"It is very kind of you. I—I never play tennis."

Gräfin Rentier shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, that does not matter. *Macht nichts*, we say in this country. Do say that you will come." She glanced in the direction of the court. "I dare not go back without you—indeed I dare not. You will come, and you will bring with you the little one also?"

Benjie slipped his hand into his mother's, and squeezed it hard.

The Gräfin tapped him lightly on the shoulder with her racquet.

"You are the little boy who played ball with my soldier brother yesterday? You will come and play with him again—will you not?"

Her smile was irresistible. Benjie put his other hand into hers, and waited in an agony of expectancy to see what his mother would do. He gave a sigh of relief as she turned away from the fountain.

Gräfin Rentier seemed to take it for granted that her invitation was accepted. Before Rose quite realised what she was doing, she found herself walking slowly over the grass by her side.

"I did not hear you come up to us," she explained a little shyly. "And being spoken to in English, it took me by surprise."

The Gräfin laughed.

"Do I speak English well?"

"Very well. I only wish my German was as good."

"In Austria we speak English much. It is the fashion. My brother, he also speaks English." She glanced at Rose; her bright expression softened. "I fear that you must have found it lonely here at Waldhof, because it has been told to me that you are a widow. You have only the little one for a companion?"

Rose looked down at Benjie.

"Yes," she answered quietly. "He is all that I have."

They were slowly approaching the tennis court, and Ilka Rentier paused for a second.

"I know that you are thinking how strange of me to speak to you. I will explain. I had only just descended from the carriage yesterday evening, when I heard all about you. Since then I have had no peace. It has been always, always: 'When will you make friends with the English lady? When will you introduce me to the English lady?'"

To Rose's look of inquiry, she made a sweeping gesture with her racquet.

"They all—my brother Rudolf: all, all these *offiziere* have been dying to make your acquaintance, but there was no one to present them. You are not offended? It is the way with our people. When they love, they love quickly. You are more cold in England. Is it not so?" They had now reached the benches at the end of the tennis court, and she lowered her voice. "I must present them all—one by one, or else it would give offence. It appears formidable, but never mind."

Rose thought it was very formidable. The list of presentations seemed endless, and the

names were wildly confusing. The introductions were taken very seriously. The bows were deep and prolonged, and hardly any one spoke.

"I shall never remember one of their names," she said in an undertone, as the last blue tunic retired to join a group of other blue tunics.

"Oh, it does not matter. *Macht nichts*, again," laughed the Gräfin. "I also do not quite remember. If you say 'Herr Major,' or 'Herr Hauptman,' or 'Herr Leutnant,' it will be quite all right." She drew Rose down on the bench beside her, and a mischievous gleam came into her eyes. "Do you know what I am looking forward to with an immense pleasure? I am waiting for the moment when Vilma Seybell, who is now playing tennis with my brother Rudolf, will turn round and discover that you are sitting here amongst us."

Rose glanced apprehensively at a group of officers who were standing within earshot.

The Gräfin shook her head.

"They will not understand—not yet at least, although they have all bought phrase books and are learning to speak English. The Herr Major has learnt to say 'shocking,' and the Herr Hauptman can say 'never mind,'

but they generally say 'shocking' when they mean 'never mind,' and 'never mind' when they mean 'shocking,' so it is a little confusing. How I wish they would finish playing! I am longing to see what Vilma will do. I do not like her, you must know. We meet often—in Vienna and other places—but there is no love between us. Vilma must always be the only one. She is jealous like a cat."

She changed the subject quickly. It was characteristic of her to change subjects suddenly and irrelevantly.

"Your little one is very good. He sits still and does not speak."

Rose glanced down at Benjie.

"He is not generally so quiet."

"I 'm waitin' for the soldier man," said Benjie stolidly, and he kept his eyes fixed on the tennis court.

"So am I," answered the Gräfin. "Rudolf is very cross. He is knocking the balls about all anyhow. He is trying to finish the game, for he wishes to come here and to be presented to you."

She turned laughingly to Rose.

"You know he has quite, quite fallen in love with you. Oh, terribly in love. He is always in love. This time it is heels over head. Ah,

now the game is finished! The last two balls he sent right up into the cherry trees. Did you see? Now, now!" she whispered, "I will present you to Rudolf and Vilma Seybell."

Rose felt Benjie's fingers tighten over hers. The moment for which he had been patiently waiting had arrived. He scrambled down from the bench and went forward a few steps.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I 'm goin' to s'lute the soldier man."

Straightening up his little body he raised his hand to his forehead.

The young Baron returned the salute as gravely and ceremoniously as though the child had been a grown man. Benjie stood quite still for a moment, then he seized Rudolf's hand and dragged him back towards the bench.

"Muvver!" he gasped breathlessly, "I 'm bringin' him. The soldier man. I 'm bringin' him. He 's comin' to s'lute you."

Ilka Rentier clapped her hands.

"Such an introduction requires no help from me. The little one is already a Master of Ceremonies. Ah!"—an exclamation of annoyance escaped her. "See what has happened! That Vilma!—is she not a cat? The Englishman has appeared and she runs to meet him.

They talk, and now she walks away with him. So—but I must wait for another time."

Mr. Egerton had arrived at exactly the right moment for Vilma.

"Where have you been all day?" she cried. "Ah, sketching!" as she caught sight of a book bulging from his pocket. "Do show me what you have done. I so adore your sketches. They are so clever."

Vilma spoke English more correctly than Ilka Rentier. Ilka was always convincing, but she was so much in a hurry to say what she wanted to say that she used the first words which came into her head, whether they belonged to one language or another.

Mr. Egerton did not take the book out of his pocket.

"I have n't done anything," he said. "I 've spent the day exploring the country."

His attention strayed towards the group at the end of the tennis court. Vilma distracted it by stumbling over the guy rope and tried to walk him away in the opposite direction. He looked again across the court as though to assure himself of something, and then allowed himself to be monopolised.

Vilma was not a dull companion. She was clever, and she could be amusing. Myles had

spent part of the previous winter in Vienna, and one way and another he had seen a good deal of Vilma. They had drifted into a kind of friendship which he had never taken the trouble actually to define. Vilma had defined it very conclusively.

He allowed her to walk him backwards and forwards without showing any signs of impatience. He listened to what she was saying, but he was aware that Rudolf Schölan had been introduced to Mrs. Trevor and had taken the seat beside her. From the sounds which came to him at intervals it was evident that Rudolf was amusing the mother as well as the child.

Presently he saw Leopoldina, in her picturesque peasant dress, come over the grass from the direction of the Schloss, and then return, taking Benjie with her. As her white sleeves and cherry-coloured ribbons disappeared out of sight, he came to a standstill.

Vilma made a movement as though she would continue walking, but he did not respond.

"I have not paid my respects to Gräfin Rentier," he said. "I must do so. I do not want her to call me a rude Englishman."

Vilma's lips tightened.

"Have you made the acquaintance of the English lady?" she asked sharply.

"I have not been introduced to her," answered Myles.

Vilma did not wish him to join the group on the other side of the tennis court. She had been straining every nerve for the last twenty minutes to prevent him; but she knew that if he had set his mind on doing it he would take his own way.

She threw back her head impatiently. If he went, she went with him.

"We will go," she said. "Yes, of course we will go."

Rose saw the couple coming towards her. Vilma's attitude, her manner of talking, the way she bent towards her companion, were intended to show that the Englishman was her own private property.

"How funny!" she thought. "And he did not want a fuss, or the hotel to gossip. He must be very unimaginative not to have found her out."

As he stood near, talking to the Gräfin, she saw him more clearly than she had done on the verandah the evening before.

He was tall and dark. The thin, sun-browned face could lay no great claim to

good looks. The features were well marked, but she could not see his eyes, for the brim of a weather-beaten felt hat was pulled down over his brow.

Vilma bowed stiffly, but otherwise took no notice of Rose. It did not cause any awkwardness, as Ilka Rentier almost at once brought up the Englishman and introduced him also. He had evidently asked her to do so.

Rudolf Schölan was called by the General to make up a set of tennis, and he went reluctantly. Myles glanced at the seat he had vacated and Rose was curious to see what he would do. She was not vindictive, but he was a friend of Vilma's. It stirred within her a faint sense of antagonism.

He drew in the vacant chair and sat down.

"I have been hoping for an opportunity of apologising for my behaviour of yesterday," he said. "Appearances were against me. Don't you think so?"

She murmured a polite reply which might mean anything.

"I saw my little friend a few minutes ago, but he would not take any notice of me. I expect he was thinking about his supper."

"I am afraid Benjie is not very fond of his supper," she said.

"Oh!" Myles thought for a moment. "I imagined all little boys were fond of their supper."

Rose put down her parasol. The sun had dipped behind the crest of the hill.

"Perhaps he is an exception, or perhaps he is outgrowing the simplicity of bread and milk."

Myles dug a little hole in the ground with the iron point of his alpenstock. Now that the shade of the parasol was removed he could see her more distinctly. She looked as though she could talk about something more interesting than bread and milk, he thought.

He made conversation, about the weather and the heat and the picturesqueness of Waldhof. The Schloss was a fine old specimen of architecture. He was evidently interested in Tyrolean history. He was quite instructive. Rudolf had not been at all instructive. He had been very amusing and he possessed that delightful charm, the charm of perfect unself-consciousness. It was as natural to him as the air he breathed. Involuntarily Rose drew a comparison between the two men.

"I have just been making a tour through the Dolomite country," continued Myles. "If you have not been there, you ought to go. The scenery is magnificent."

"So I have always heard," answered Rose.

Her voice lacked interest.

"I tried to take a sketch of one or two places, but they 're rather rough," said Myles.

Any one knowing him would have been very much surprised at his next action. He drew his sketch-book out of his pocket and opened it. He took out one of the sketches, and held it at arm's length.

"Rather gaudy," he said.

"It 's a wonderful effect of colour," said Rose after a moment's consideration.

"It was taken at dawn, just below the Monte Cristallo. That blood-red glow on the snow is rather difficult to catch at the right moment. I had to camp out all night."

The sketch was clever—bold and broad, and the colour was startling in its vivid intensity. Rose was interested in spite of herself. She was too generous not to admit it.

"May I see some more?" she said.

He turned over one or two sketches. A loose sheet slipped and fluttered to the ground. It fell within a few inches of Vilma's feet. She

could not fail to notice it. It lay face uppermost, a patch of bright colour against the sun-dried grass.

An angry light came into her eyes. He had made an excuse and refused to show her his sketch-book, and yet he was showing it to this English girl, whom he hardly knew. She felt that she hated the English girl. She had tried to keep her out of their circle and would have succeeded if Ilka Rentier had not spoilt everything by making friends with her.

She was too angry to sit still and look on. She got up and left the tennis court abruptly.

Myles picked up the sketch. He had not noticed Vilma's annoyance.

"May I see it?" said Rose.

He hesitated, then he gave it to her.

"A little place in the north of Italy," he said. "Very primitive part of the world. There 's a *diligence* runs from Belluno across the frontier to Cortina; I came that way."

He did not look at her.

She handed him back the sketch without making any remark.

CHAPTER V

"BUT YOU ARE A VERY NICE ENGLISH!"

THE Speise Saal was more than usually crowded that evening, and Frau Wolff was not present. Rose was very glad. She did not wish to talk to Frau Wolff.

Ilka Rentier, who was with her husband at one of the small tables, did not leave the room when supper was over, but came across to where Rose was sitting. She held a lighted cigarette between her fingers and laid her case on the table and nodded towards it.

"You smoke? No? If you do not object I will sit with you and finish my cigarette." She drew in a chair. "Of what are you thinking? Are you comparing us with the society of your own country? Do you find Waldhof agreeable?"

Rose's thoughts had been far away from Waldhof. She had been dreaming. Dreaming of a little village in sunny Italy. A white-

walled house stood on the outskirts of the village, round it clustered the olive woods. High up on the hillside lay a lonely graveyard where the cypress trees swayed in the breeze, pointing their dark fingers to heaven. She knew it all so well, and this Englishman, he knew it too. It was so strange. Why had he made that sketch?—for the little village had nothing very characteristic about it; nothing likely to attract an artist's fancy. It was very strange!

She was glad that Ilka had broken in upon her thoughts, but she welcomed her a little shyly. She had grown so unaccustomed to being sought out and made friends with.

"Waldhof is very kind to me," she said. "You all know each other so well here, just like a big family, and I am quite a stranger —and English."

"But that is all the more agreeable, because you are a very nice English. Oh, I have met a great many English. When one travels one meets them, and it gives me a great deal of pleasure to study them."

Rose saw that her eyes were twinkling.

"Do we amuse you?"

Ilka laughed.

"You would call me most impolite if I say

yes! It would appear that I was making fun of you, which is not true. I love the English very much."

"No, I should not think you were making fun of us. I wonder how we appear to you?"

"You would not be offended if I make a little play for you? No—I do not think you are stiff."

She drew herself up and hid her cigarette.

"There is a kind of English which is like —this. She is very *hochwohlgeboren*. She comes into the *salon* elegantly. She has a neat head and she is very distinguished, and she never forgets that she is distinguished. When she goes walking her boots say to the stones, 'I do not wish to make your acquaintance.' But *ach mein Gott!* there is again quite another kind of English who much frizzes her hair and is not elegant. She wears a very short skirt and walks with a stick. Her hat! It has been rained upon many times. On Sundays she puts on her best clothes and goes to church. Do you know her?"

Rose laughed.

"What other funny things do we do?"

Ilka rattled on gaily.

"Your Englishman when he is *hochwohl-*

geboren! He comes into a room with a look of suspicion. He has a high collar and a high head, and he is grim when he speaks. He looks at every one as though he was an enemy. He has a higher collar and a higher head on Sunday when he goes to church with his wife. And he does go to church with his wife—our husbands do not."

She picked up her cigarette again.

"Do I not talk nonsense? But I do it to amuse you, for of course you are not like the lady whose boots are so proud, or the girl who much frizzes her hair."

She did not wait for any comment.

"What do you think of us?" she demanded. "That we are barbarians? In England you would not like to eat in a restaurant with but bare boards for your feet and peasant girls to wait on you? Here, at Waldhof, we live like gipsies."

"I think it is delightful," said Rose. "We are horribly conventional. You do what you like because you like it; not because other people think you ought to do it."

"*Pouf!* What do the thinks of other people matter? Also we know all about each other. There is nothing to find out. These officers, for example? One knows what they are.

How much money they have. All about their families—all—everything. Do you observe how simply they eat and drink? Some are richer than others, but there is no rivalry. Do you know they sometimes make a league among themselves and say, 'We will only spend so much on our dinner and so much on our supper.' It is a very good arrangement, for one plate cannot cry out to the other, 'I am richer than you.' Money is very pleasant, but it is not everything. Most often it is *bourgeois* to be rich. What then?"

She shrugged her shoulders expressively.

"Money!" exclaimed Rose. "It is so horribly vulgar to put money before anything else. In England I am afraid we think a great deal about money."

Ilka blew a little curl of smoke into the air and watched it float towards the open window.

"But then you cannot compare Austrian society with English society," she said. "The things of which it is made are altogether different. Your classes walk together in a way that ours cannot. Your aristocracy, your families of good birth, can go into commerce. They can make soaps, or polish for the boots, or sauces for the *cuisine*. We cannot, because our commerce is made by the

Jews! *Ach!*" she exclaimed contemptuously. "And these Jews? Our husbands and our sons cannot work side by side in commerce with a Jew. It would be impossible! Their ways are not our ways. We would not condescend to make money in the way they do. No! We are not like you in England. With you money can be ennobled. It can walk hand in hand with the most aristocratic of your families, but we—if we stretch out to gather riches we must take the hand of a Jew. It is a pity, for our sons they remain poor."

Rose looked at Frau Wolff's empty chair.

"I wonder why it makes so much difference?" she said hesitatingly. "Because a man's a Jew he is n't kept out of society—in England."

Ilka Rentier made a little grimace.

"Ah, so! In England—yes, that may be. There is a saying that every country gets the Jew which it deserves. Doubtless you are fortunate. But in Austria—in Hungary!" She threw out her hands. "A Hungarian Jew!—Impossible! Have we not an example here? From her feet to her voice, which she carries in her nose, she is Jew, Jew, Jew!"

"I know her. She sits opposite to me at the table here."

The Gräfin nodded.

"You have perhaps suffered. She has without doubt made of you a glove which she has turned outside in and searched into all the extreme ends of the fingers. That is Jew—to be inquisitive. I have seen her watching the world through her opera-glasses. She is in great fear in case one small morsel of interest might escape her observation. Oh, she is a most terrible person. Do not let us talk of her any more. What are you going to do now? How do you amuse yourself? Last night you did not come to the Lese Saal, and to-night I also do not go there. I return to my own apartments." A sudden idea seemed to strike her. "Will you come with me?" she said. "I would like to show you where I live. Our lodgment is in a farm. There. You can see it through the window, but a few minutes' walk from here."

"Yes, I know the farm," said Rose. "It has a delightful dairy. My little boy loves to play there."

"Ah, so? You come with me? Yes?"

They passed out through a side door into the garden.

"You must know that my husband is the Inspecting General for this district," explained

Ilka as they went along. "When the regiments are collected for the manœuvres he must have lodgment; therefore we come to Waldhof. I find that to live in a farm with the peasants and the cows and the pigs is very amusing. See! Here we have already arrived."

She gathered up her skirts and picked her way across a courtyard which was littered with trodden straw, and little puddles of water.

"In such a place one has to be careful," she said, glancing back over her shoulder. "It would be well if you were to follow my feet." She pointed in the direction of some rather tumble-down stabling. "It is very convenient. My husband requires to keep his horses here. There are Rudolf's horses also—he is Staff Officer, you know. Sometimes they go away for a few days. It is a large district and there are many camps, but Waldhof is our headquarters. Here I stay. This summer I make some visits before I come, therefore it was but yesterday that I arrive."

She had been chattering fast all the time since she left the Schloss. Now she stopped before a wooden door crossed with heavy iron bars.

"Shut your eyes," she exclaimed. "Quite, quite shut, and give me your hand. I wish to lead you. I wish to give you a surprise. It must break upon you very suddenly."

Rose obeyed. The door creaked on its hinges and she felt herself being drawn along what appeared to be a narrow passage which smelt damp and mouldy. Then a breath of fresh air met her, and she heard the Gräfin's voice whisper:

"Be cautious. Two steps down. So—now you may open your eyes."

They had emerged from the passage, which was a kind of tunnel burrowing its way through the main portion of the farm-buildings and had come out on to a narrow terrace festooned and garlanded on every side by great masses of wistaria. Ilka took Rose's hand and hurried her across to the edge of the balustrade.

Immediately below the terrace the ground fell away abruptly to the banks of a mountain torrent. Its bed was deep and broken; clouds of silver spray marked the spot where a great spout of water sprang from a cleft in the rock.

"Is it not charming?" she cried.

"I thought you were playing some trick on me. What a delightful place! How did you find it?"

"There are many such in this country if you seek for them. We have been here for one, two, three summers. The Hausfrau of the farm she attends upon us; we require but little because we eat at the restaurant. Would you like to see our rooms? I give you one peep."

She drew Rose up to a little iron-barred window.

They shaded their eyes and looked through.

Bare, whitewashed walls, a carpetless floor, an enormous carved chest and two wooden bedsteads was all that was distinguishable.

Ilka laughed.

"When we come to Waldhof we lead the simple life—Fritz and I."

"If I had this terrace I should never want to go away from it," said Rose. "It must be cool here on the hottest day. My rooms are dreadfully hot, but— Of course they are not very good rooms. I cannot afford very good rooms."

She went back to the balustrade and sat on the edge looking across to the distant hills. A baby moon showed its silver rim above the line of one great sloping shoulder, the murmur of the waterfall sounded in her ears. A straggling mass of honeysuckle twining its

tendrils amongst the wistaria filled the air with sweetness.

A new sweetness seemed to have crept into her heart to-night. A shy, frightened thing that she was almost afraid to capture. What was it? It was only a touch of something tender and human: a little kindness, a hand stretched out in sympathy.

She glanced at Ilka.

How had she done it? How had she spread this sense of joyousness? It seemed as easy for her to spread happiness as it was to scatter the rose leaves which had fallen from the flowers in the bosom of her dress.

"Look!" she cried, as they fluttered over the balustrade. "They fly down in the darkness. Now the waterfall has gathered them into its arms."

Rose saw her raise her head in a listening attitude.

"Do you hear anything?" she asked.

Ilka nodded.

"It is Rudolf riding through the forest. He has been with despatches, and he must have ridden very fast to be back so soon. Now we lose the sound. No—he is passing over the ground where the pine needles lie

soft and thick. Listen! Again we hear. He is now crossing the water."

The hollow sound of hoofs striking on the wooden planking of a bridge fell distinctly on their ears. They heard Rudolf ride on into the stable-yard and then the call for his servant to come and take his horse.

Ilka threw the last of the rose leaves over the railing.

"He will go to the restaurant, and he will seek in the Speise Saal and the Lese Saal and everywhere, and we are not there. Poor Rudi!"

CHAPTER VI

COFFEE AND ROLLS AND A GREAT DEAL OF LOVE

ROSE always breakfasted in the garden unless it rained or something happened to prevent her. She was out earlier than usual the next morning, and was sitting on the verandah waiting for her coffee and rolls when she heard the wicket gate which led from the grounds of the Schloss into the road below open, and Rudolf Schölan entered and came up the steps.

He looked as though he quite expected to find her sitting there. He clicked his heels together and bowed.

"Good morning," he said, smiling.

"Good morning," she answered. "I thought I was early, but you are early also."

"It is very pleasant earliness for me," and he bowed again.

He looked very smart and well turned out. He did not wear his hair cropped to the verge of baldness in the way that the majority of

the officers did. A fair moustache was brushed stiffly back from his upper lip, and he wore small side-whiskers after the fashion in the Austrian Army.

"Early?" he repeated. "Oh no, this is not early. Since four hours the soldiers have been drilling and marching. I have done much work already. Now I play. The *gnädige Frau* permits me to breakfast with her?"

Rose smiled and said yes. It occurred to her that an Englishman would probably not have made the request on so slight an acquaintance. But there was a delightful want of self-consciousness about Rudolf that disarmed offence.

"Do you often come up to the Schloss for your morning coffee?" she asked, as Marie appeared with a heavily-laden tray. Seeing that the Herr Baron and the English lady were sitting together, she distributed the cups and saucers equally between them.

"I go where my heart takes me. I think that I will now find that Schloss Waldhof agrees with me very well."

He altered the arrangements of the table so as to make them more convenient and took off the lid of the honey jar.

"You must understand that I always go

where my heart takes me. Where I love, I go."

It was an ingenuous way of starting a new acquaintance. He continued glibly:

"I have loved a great many times. So many times that I cannot remember the names of all the ladies that I have loved." He began counting on his fingers. "There was Bertha, and Editha, and Theresa, and Wilhelmina —" He paused. "Wilhelmina? No. I loved not her for long. She talk too much. It is not agreeable when a lady talk too much. There is nothing left to do. No, she was not long for me. Quick march, *pouf!* I stepped away." He got up and walked round the table.

Rose laughed. How young and fresh he was, with his funny little ways of expressing himself. One would never dream of taking him seriously; he did not expect to be taken seriously.

"I amuse you?" he said, as he threw himself back again in his chair. "Do you think I am a strange animal? An Englishman? would he not talk to you so of his loves?"

"I am sure he would not. Englishmen are not confidential unless they know you very well. I was only introduced to you yesterday."

"Yesterday! And you are still cold, while I—I love you! I repeat these words, they please me. I love you."

He drew the sugar basin towards him and dropped three lumps of sugar into his cup.

"That is not possible," said Rose, reddening. "You must not say that. You intend to say that you like me perhaps. Thank you. It is very pretty of you to say such nice things."

"Like! What is like in German?" demanded Rudolf.

"How can I explain? Your language is so difficult—impossible to translate."

"Impossible! It has more reason than yours," he retorted. "In three days I could learn your grammar, but the pronounciation! It is without rule. You write Elephant and pronounce it Squirrel." His voice sank persuasively. "Tell me, *gnädige Frau!* What is the meaning of like? Does it mean more than to love?"

"No." Rose brought out the monosyllable very distinctly. Rudolf's blue eyes looked very innocent—too innocent. "It means—the best word I can give you in German for it is *gern.*"

"That!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "*Gott!* Then I have no use for that word 'like.' That is not my meaning. It is not enough strong. No, I mean love! And there is another word I have also learnt. Dearling! That means a great deal of love, does it not? Love, Dearling. Dearling, Love." He repeated the words several times with great satisfaction.

"Who taught you English?" asked Rose.

"Oh, these words I pick for myself since yesterday. I require them at once. They were necessary for my conversation. When I love a lady, I must know how to tell her that I love her. How does an Englishman make love? How does an Englishman propose to his girl?"

Without waiting for an answer, he sprang to his feet, and, drawing his sword, he held the blade upright behind his back.

"So! Will—you—marry—me? That is what he would demand in a large voice. There would be no beginnings and endings. It would be very solemn! And after that—I do not know what would happen. Does an Englishman amuse himself when he is in love? When does the kissing begin?" He broke off abruptly. "*Sacrament!* But I see the Eng-

lishman approaching who is staying in this hotel. He will doubtless wish to sit also at this table."

"I am sure he won't. He will sit by himself," said Rose. "We are not a sociable nation in the early morning."

Mr. Egerton made his way to a vacant table at the extreme end of the verandah. Marie brought him his coffee, and also some letters and papers which had come in by the morning post. The former he glanced over carelessly, and ripping off the cover of the *Times*, propped it up against the coffee-pot and disappeared behind its pages.

Rudolf raised his eyebrows.

"Have you been quirrelling with the Mr. Englishman?"

"Quirrelling? No, I have not been quarrelling. What makes you think so?"

"Because he sit so far away. That is incomprehensible to me. If I were to find a lady so charming of my own country, I would sit near beside her. More near than I now sit with you." His interest in Mr. Egerton deepened. "Is it the custom for an Englishman to read the journal so at breakfast? Would his wife allow him to retire his head in such a manner if she were present?"

"He would do it without asking her," answered Rose, laughing.

"*Ach, wie langweilig!* I perceive now why the English journals are of such a large size." He put his head on one side and looked at Mr. Egerton critically. "This Englishman now? Do you find him a pretty man? I see that he wears a moustache, but he does not wear *cotolettes*. Is it not the fashion in England to wear *cotolettes*?"

"Cutlets?" repeated Rose blankly.

Rudolf passed his hand over his neatly-trimmed side-whiskers.

"These are *cotolettes*," he said. "Your officers do not wear them. No? You do not like them? Oh yes, I observe quickly. I perceive that you do not like them."

He was lost in thought for a few seconds, then he sighed.

"You answer nothing, therefore I know of a certainty you do not like my *cotolettes*."

Rose was crumbling down a piece of roll, and feeding the sparrows who were hopping about on the flagged stones close by.

"It is only a fashion," she said evasively.

But he demanded a more explicit answer. Did she, or did she not like his *cotolettes?*

She declined to be drawn into a discussion. It was a matter of fashion.

"And I have not time to argue about it," she added, "because I have finished my breakfast, and I must go away now."

"Go away!" Rudolf jumped to his feet. "Why do you go away? I find it very agreeable to talk to you."

"I always take my little boy for a walk now, before it gets too hot."

Rudolf bowed.

"With your permission I accompany you."

As he had taken the permission for granted, she could not say anything. They passed down the steps of the verandah, and disappeared amongst the luxuriant foliage of the garden.

Mr. Egerton was apparently engrossed in the pages of his newspaper, but he saw them go. A movement of his hand upset the balance of the *Times*, and it fell over sideways into the honey.

He picked it up, but the honey stuck to his fingers. He was tearing off the smeared edges, when he heard his name called, and looked round.

"Charles!" he murmured. "What 's he doing?"

A wooden corridor, partly covered in with glass and from which the Wasser Kur baths opened, ran along one side of the Schloss at right angles with the verandah, and from one of the open windows a face peered anxiously.

Mr. Ridley was trying to make his voice sound as unobtrusive as possible.

"Myles!" he called cautiously. "I want the German dictionary. Do you know where it is?"

"The German dictionary? What are you going to do with the German dictionary in your bath?"

"I want to——"

The voice ceased abruptly, and the head vanished. There was the sound of a heavy footfall, and the swish of a woman's skirts. Frau Wolff, in a morning *négligé*, which floated out from the bountiful curves of her figure like the full sails of a ship, was seen approaching. She carried a bath-towel in her hand, with which she was making signs towards the window where Mr. Ridley's head had protruded the instant before.

"I komm, I komm. I also am about to take ze bass. I speaks Ingleesh," she cried as she drew nearer.

Myles gulped down the last of his coffee, and, seizing his letters, fled.

Charles had bolted back like a rabbit into its burrow, but the corridor was practically an *impasse* terminating with the last bathroom. He rattled the handle. The door was locked. An angry voice stormed gutturally from within.

Frau Wolff had entered the corridor, and was gaining on him. The solid tread of her sandal-bound feet sounded every moment growing nearer, and with nervous fingers he buttoned up the collar of his coat to disguise the fact that he was shirtless.

Such modest panderings to the proprieties were entirely thrown away upon his pursuer. In a Wasser Kur establishment such as Schloss Waldhof any dress was permissible during the morning hours, and Frau Wolff's own costume was of the airiest.

She smiled encouragement as she came to a standstill in front of him and Charles plucked up courage. Surely he might feel safe with any one so fat and ugly, and she spoke English.

Her smile broadened.

"You wish for to take ze bass?" she said. "It vill be a great pleasure to me to help you to take ze bass. Ingleesh people is very fond of bassings and of all kind of cleanliness."

Charles felt that he was blushing. Did she

mean to infer that they were to bathe together? But the joy of finding some one who could speak his own language overcame his shyness. He could at any rate tell her of his difficulties.

"I have been trying to explain about the temperature of my bath," he said. "It is very awkward, because the person who looks after the baths is a woman. I can't get her to understand that I don't want her. She won't leave me alone. She follows me about with a thermometer."

Frau Wolff nodded energetically, until the top knot of hair over her forehead almost fell into her eyes.

"But yes, of course, it is a woman who gives ze bass. She is a very goot woman for ze bass."

"But will you kindly explain to her that I don't wish her to bath me?" said Charles. "And that I like the water hot. I turned it on myself, but she turned it off again. She 's in my bathroom now with her thermometer, and I can't get her out."

"*Ja, ja!*" exclaimed Frau Wolff. "But I vill assist you vis pleasure," and followed by Charles she swept along the corridor to where one of the doors stood ajar. Sounds

like those of an angry hen scratching about in its desecrated nest were heard from within.

Frau Wolff called out something in German, and a yellow-faced woman with oily curls bobbing against her cheek-bones thrust her head through the opening of the door. She held a large thermometer in one hand and a massage brush in the other, with which she gesticulated violently.

Charles stood nervously in the background, straining his ears to understand what she was saying. The only word he could make any attempt to repeat was "*Gefährlich.*"

He touched Frau Wolff on the arm.

"*Gefährlich,*" he whispered anxiously. "What does that mean? She 's kept on saying it over and over again. She shakes the thermometer in my face and says, '*Gefährlich.*'"

Frau Wolff threw out her hands and rolled up her eyes despairingly.

"*Ach,* I know, but ze Ingleesh of it I do not translate." Then with a cry of delight she clasped the pocket of her *peignoir* and drew out a small red book. "Am I not stoopid? Am I not a sheep?" she murmured, turning over its pages. "Breaking my head to remember, ven all zese times I haf ze

dictionary vis vich I vas translating ze conversation of ze Herr Baron and ze Ingleesh Frau. So. So."

She ran her stumpy forefinger up and down the pages marked G., and turning to Charles thrust the book under his nose.

"*Gefährlich*—Dangerous!"

"*Ja, ja!*" screamed the bath-woman. She plunged the thermometer into the bath, and with the water dripping from it shook it in Charles's face.

"Dangerous! Rubbish!" he exclaimed. He turned on the water and held his finger under the tap. "It is n't even tepid."

"*Gefährlich!*" shrieked the bath-woman, and she rushed forward to turn the water off again.

Charles's meekness vanished. He knew now what she was talking about. He was not going to be bullied by any woman into having a tepid bath when he wanted a hot one.

He took her by the shoulders in his excitement.

"I don't care whether it 's dangerous or not," he cried. "Go away!" and he pushed her out.

With a dexterous twist of her arm she snatched the key out of the door in passing

and slammed it in his face. Then she locked him in from the outside.

She shook her fist, and fetching a chair planted it against the door and sat down.

"*Gefährlich!*" she kept muttering. "*Gefährlich!*"

Frau Wolff raised her voice reassuringly through the key-hole.

"Haf no fears in ze bass, my frient. Zis womans I vill make depart in a few times. I sends her avay. I guards you my own self. Haf no fears—no fears at all."

Mr. Ridley was allowed to have his bath in peace, but he had only exchanged one evil for another. He might have been able to escape from the bath-woman, but there was no escaping from Frau Wolff. An hour later Mr. Egerton saw him sitting under a tree with her in the garden.

"She 'll pick his brains like a hawk," he thought uneasily. "I hoped he was safe when he said he was going to give up society."

He had half a mind to nip this undesirable friendship in the bud, but a second glance at Frau Wolff decided him. It was safer to keep out of her reach.

Frau Wolff never lost time in preliminary

skirmishings. She began to question Mr. Ridley at once.

"Are you married?" she asked. "You do not vear ze ring. But Englishmens do not vear ze ring."

Charles bridled. He had never been spoken to so pointedly on the subject of matrimony before.

"No," he admitted. "No—I am not married."

Frau Wolff's beady black eyes scanned him critically.

"Vy is you not married? Is it becos you haf been a bad boy zat no ones vill marry you?"

Charles edged away from her. Foreign females were certainly embarrassing. First the bath-woman, and now this one was asking him questions he did n't know how to answer.

He was beginning a stammering explanation, but she cut him short.

"Your frient? He also is not married?"

"No," said Charles, rather huffily. His own affairs were dismissed just as he had made up his mind what to say.

Frau Wolff had reasons of her own for being more interested in his friend than in himself.

"Nor is he—*Ach!* vat is ze vord I require? —*verlobt.* Betrothed! Zat is ze vord. Is he betrothed? He look not rich."

"To my knowledge he is not betrothed. And he is not a poor man. My friend has a large fortune—a very large fortune indeed," said Charles, who disliked misunderstandings.

Frau Wolff leant forward eagerly.

"You know about his moneys? You are assured zat he is rich?"

"Certainly I know. I am an intimate friend of the family."

Frau Wolff smiled to herself.

"Ze young Baronin Seybell knows of zese moneys. *Ach mein Gott,* but she is clever, ze young Baronin." She continued: "He address himself by ze names of two peoples. I observe his letters in ze bureau. Ze first of zese names is ze name of ze English Frau who lives in zis hotel."

Charles nearly jumped off his chair.

"Dear, dear!" he exclaimed hurriedly. "You don't say so? What a strange coincidence—very strange indeed."

"Speak not so fast," said Frau Wolff peremptorily. "And inform me vy your frient address himself in such a manner."

Charles moved uneasily. The uncomfor-

table remembrance that he had been warned against discussing his friend's affairs recurred to him.

"Oh well, you see," he began lamely, "some people are always lucky. They get fortunes left them, and—come into estates. They seem to be born with a golden spoon in their mouths."

Frau Wolff regarded him suspiciously. She shook her head.

"I onderstand not such golden spoons. I ask you vy he address himself by ze name of ze English Frau?"

Mr. Ridley looked round despairingly. He wished he had the courage to run away.

"It was a family matter," he stammered. "Quite a usual thing to do under the circumstances. His mother——"

"Ah! So, so. I onderstand. But yes, I onderstand. Zere vos a—ahem a scandal, *nicht wahr?* You haf such sings in England? Shockeeng! Shockeeng!" She leant nearer him and shook her finger in his face. "Shockeeng! Shockeeng!" she repeated.

"Not at all! Not at all!" exclaimed Charles, retreating as she advanced. "I assure you there was nothing—nothing of what you seem to imagine. You misunderstand me entirely.

Mr. Egerton has always been a rich man. His father was a rich man. His grandfather was a rich man. He only inherited this property of his mother's recently. And it is quite a usual thing to have to adopt a family name on such occasions. I assure you there was nothing—nothing shocking about it at all."

His staccato voice rose several tones higher with excitement. He took out his pocket-handkerchief and mopped his forehead. He was feeling very hot and uncomfortable.

"I really had to explain," he murmured. "I could not allow such a misapprehension to remain in her mind."

Frau Wolff leant back in her seat and folded her hands. What a lot of interesting things she had found out. She ruminated over them pleasantly. She half shut her eyes and looked as if she had gone to sleep. She was so quiet that Mr. Ridley thought she had. He was sidling away from her with the idea of escaping unobserved when she woke up again.

"I thought of going for a walk," he said hurriedly, and took out his watch. "The Cure insists upon a sharp walk in the morning and twenty minutes rest before the mid-day meal."

"*Ach*, ze Kur, ze Kur," sighed Frau Wolff.

"I also make ze walk every day, so as to become more meagre, but I go not to-day. I remain to sink." She tapped her forehead significantly. "I sink of all ze sings you haf tell me."

Qualms of conscience accompanied Charles on his constitutional. He tried to hearten himself with the consolation that Myles and Frau Wolff were not acquainted.

"But she 'll find a way of getting to know him if she wants to," he thought uneasily, and the reflection was not comforting.

CHAPTER VII

THE SACRIFICE AT THE FRISEUR'S

RUDOLF was hardly out of earshot of the verandah before he surprised Rose by changing his mind about going for a walk.

He had remembered an important engagement, he told her gravely, and tried to extract a promise that he would find her in the garden on his return.

But she would give no promise; and he departed, vowing that she could not possibly hide from him and that he would search in every direction until he found her.

After he had gone, she spent an unprofitable quarter of an hour hunting for Benjie and Leopoldina. They could not be found anywhere. Then it occurred to her that they might have gone to the dairy, and she turned her steps in that direction.

The dairy was a source of great interest to Benjie. He was sometimes allowed to turn

the handle of the butter machine and to dabble his fingers in the big wooden trough which stood outside the door where the *Zimmer Mädchens* scoured their churns and washed their yellow milk dishes.

The *Zimmer Mädchens* made a picturesque group under the shade of the trees, pattering in and out of the dairy with their bare feet: bright coloured handkerchiefs were knotted over their thickly braided hair, and the full sleeves of their white bodices were drawn up from their sun-browned arms.

They were very busy, but when they saw the English lady one of them volunteered the information that Leopoldina had gone to fetch a glass of milk for the *Kindchen*, and that the *Kindchen* was playing on the grass round the corner of the house.

Following the direction to which she pointed, Rose heard the sound of children's voices, and was just in time to catch sight of a boy with very fat legs disappearing in the distance, and to see her son collapse on to the ground in a state of exhaustion. Clasped in his arms was a puppy of a few weeks old.

She knelt down beside him on the grass.

"How hot you are," she said reproachfully. "What have you been doing?"

A flushed little face looked up at her.

"I 've been fightin' wis Franz."

"So I thought."

Rose looked after the disappearing figure. Franz was the son of the Frau Hauptman, one of the officers' wives.

"But I don't like you to fight, and Franz would not fight unless you made him. He 's too big for you to fight with."

Benjie's cheeks flushed still hotter.

"But I have n't been knocked down, muvver. I 'm only—only takin' a rest," he explained, with a little pant of anxiety between each breath.

Rose smiled. She picked up his hat which was lying on the grass and put it on his head.

"Yes, I saw you as I came round the corner. But what were you fighting about?"

"Franz pinched the puppy," exclaimed Benjie. "He kept on pinchin', pinchin', pinchin'. An' he 's the dearest, darlin'st puppy. May n't I has it to sleep wis me, muvver, 'stead os Curly Kate? When I hug it tight it squeaks, 'cos it loves me so."

"I think it 's squeaking because you 're hugging it too tight. And look! It 's hungry. It 's trying to eat my gloves. Suppose we

give it to Leopoldina to take back to the farm? Here she comes with the milk."

He reluctantly allowed the puppy to be taken from him, and to console him for its loss, he was given a letter of his mother's and told he might come to the post-office with her and put it into the box himself.

The village of Waldhof boasted of only one shop, which served a variety of purposes. On one side of the door was the post-office and general store; on the other, was a small compartment where the Friseur carried on his business. It was a very profitable business. With so many soldiers in the camp he was kept well employed.

The flimsiest rag of a curtain draped the division between the two departments—and after dropping the letter into the box, and seeing that his mother was engaged in writing something on a slip of paper at the postmaster's desk, Benjie tiptoed across to where hung the curtain, and peeped through.

The Friseur caught sight of the curly head pressed against the muslin and called out cheerily:

"*Guten tag? Guten tag?*"

He flourished his soapy razor in one hand and pulled aside the curtain with the other.

Benjie danced up and down on the creaky boards, and Rose looked round to see what he was doing.

Through the open door she saw a white-sheeted figure sitting in front of a shampooing basin, and reflected in the mirror overhead was an upturned face lathered from chin to brow.

She hastily returned to her writing.

"*Gnädige Frau!*" cried a gay voice from the other side of the curtain.

Rose bent her head over the desk and pretended not to hear.

It did not shock Rudolf in the smallest degree to find that a lady of his acquaintance saw him being shaved, and although he received no answer, he continued to make remarks through the curtain.

When the Friseur had finished, he threw back the white sheet in which he had been wrapped, and picking up a brush carefully dusted the collar of his tunic. He leant forward and looked at himself critically in the mirror above the shampooing basin.

"*Goot,*" he said, nodding.

He gave the Friseur twenty *hellers* more than his charge; and the next minute was standing beside the desk in the post-office.

Rose was counting over some change. She put the money into her purse before turning round. She looked at him, and then looked again.

"What is the matter with you? What have you done to yourself?" she asked, in a puzzled voice.

Rudolf was smiling. He appeared to be very well pleased. He ran his fingers gently down the side of his cheek.

"The *cotolettes* is gone! What you do not like is no more for me." He pointed backwards over his shoulder. "I leave them with the Herr Friseur."

"Oh, but why have you done such a thing?" cried Rose. "I wish you had n't. I—I don't like it. Your face is so brown and the shaved places look dreadful—little white patches. Oh, I wish you had n't done it."

"*Himmel!*" exclaimed Rudolf. "I do this thing for you. I make myself English, and it is of no use. How am I to give pleasure to you?" He took a step backwards and threw out his arms dramatically. "What am I to do now?"

"Don't knock me down," said a quiet voice from behind.

Wheeling round, Rudolf found Mr. Egerton

had entered the shop unobserved. Without a moment's hesitation he plunged into an explanation. What he had done, why he had done it, and the unsatisfactory result of his experiment.

Rose watched Mr. Egerton's face as he listened. She was not quite sure but that under the quiet of his manner he was not laughing at the impetuosity of the young Baron. She did not wish Rudolf to be laughed at.

"You have paid me a great compliment, Herr Baron," she said, smiling, and the sweetness of the smile sent Rudolf's spirits up with a bound.

"*Ach!* but the sun shines again," he cried. "I am rewarded. I please you? I am more English?"

"No, you are not a bit English. You are quite, quite Austrian. I don't believe an Englishman would have cut off his whiskers to please me."

She called Benjie, and making a little sweeping bow which included the Postmaster and the Friseur and Mr. Egerton, she left the shop, followed by Rudolf.

"A nasty one for me," murmured Myles as he laid a *krone* piece down on the counter and waited for his stamps.

Outside in the village street Rudolf took off his hat and walked in the hottest part of the road.

"I go in the sun," he said. "It is necessary that my face should become of one colour."

"And get a sunstroke," remonstrated Rose.

"*Pouf!* Not at all. No strokes go through my head. It is too hard."

It was only a few minutes walk from the village to the Schloss. Under the trees, exactly where Charles Ridley had left her, sat Frau Wolff. She was like a large black spider waiting for its prey.

She saw the returning trio before they saw her, and heaving herself out of her chair she waddled down the path to meet them.

Rudolf was the first to scent danger. With a sudden exclamation he caught up Benjie by the arms, and, swinging him on to his shoulder, darted behind a syringa bush. He made violent grimaces at the approaching figure through the branches, and besought Rose in a loud whisper to fly whilst there was yet time.

"That woman of a Jew," he hissed through his teeth. "*Himmel!* but she is colossāl. She will devour us. If she catch us we will never escape. Fly, *gnädige Frau!* There is yet time."

"Hush!" whispered Rose. "It 's no use, she has seen me—she 'll follow. I 'll say something to her and then perhaps she 'll go back."

Frau Wolff was bursting with importance. She pounced upon Rose hungrily. Standing in the middle of the pathway, with her hands planted on her huge hips and her beady eyes starting out of her head like black boot buttons, she burst into an excited *résumé* of the conversation she had had with Mr. Ridley.

Rose tapped the ground impatiently with the point of her parasol. Frau Wolff spoke so incoherently she could only half understand what she was talking about. It was something connected with Mr. Egerton, she gathered that much, but why Frau Wolff was so excited and why the subject was supposed to interest her she could not understand. She wished she had taken Rudolf's advice and fled. Frau Wolff kept her trump-card to the last. She drew from her pocket a piece of paper on which she had laboriously written down Mr. Egerton's full name, copied from the register in the hotel bureau.

"Ze name of ze English Herr," she announced, flourishing it triumphantly.

The word "Trevor" caught Rose's eyes.

There was some association between her name and Mr. Egerton's, and Frau Wolff was demanding an explanation.

She did not receive one.

"I know nothing about it," said Rose, and taking advantage of an opportune moment she slipped past. She gave no time for pursuit, but walked on quickly into the Schloss. On the hall table the Visitors' Book lay open. The last entry stared her in the face:

M. Trevor Egerton.
C. E. Ridley. } England.

CHAPTER VIII

MYLES EGERTON OFFERS REPARATION

"A PICNIC? And you want me to come? How nice of you!"

Rose was leaning over the balcony answering a question which had been called up to her from the garden below. Looking down into Ilka Rentier's upturned face she saw her put her finger to her lips. She understood. It was not advisable to raise one's voice in the vicinity of Frau Wolff's hearing.

"I will come down and talk to you," she called softly.

Ilka was waiting for her.

"I had almost forgot that Monster of Curiosity," she said. "Before long she will provide herself with a telescope and an *Apparat* for listening through closed doors. I do not wish all the *Gesellschaft* of the hotel to come to this picnic. Therefore, I do not speak of it very loud. Vilma will come. She

is a cat, but some of the officers they find her agreeable, so I must invite her. You will be charmed with the place to which we go. It is high up in the Schulterthal. There is a restaurant where they give you all manner of eatings of the country. It is most picturesque and beautiful You walk well? The road is wild in some places."

Rose glanced at Ilka's little French shoes and high heels.

"I think I could manage the walking," she said. "When do we start?"

"In one hour from now: we will meet at my lodgment. I have also asked the Englishman, Mr. Egerton. My husband and Rudolf are just now at the—what you call it?—shooting exercises of the soldiers, but they meet with us at the restaurant. I go! Do not be late. The wife of the Herr Hauptman also accompanies us, and she is always in great haste when she climbs a mountain. She has the legs of an ostrich."

In spite of the warning to be punctual, at twenty minutes past the time arranged for starting Rose had not made her appearance at the Rentier's quarters.

"What am I to do?" whispered the Gräfin to Mr. Egerton. "You perceive that the wife

of the Herr Hauptman is most anxious to start?"

The lady who was credited with having the legs of an ostrich was showing visible signs of impatience. She carried a large stick, and her skirts were fastened up very high with many loops and buttons.

"Would you like me to wait for Mrs. Trevor and bring her on?" suggested Myles. "I know the way to the place. I was up there yesterday."

Ilka's eyes danced, and she laughed up in his face. Vilma was standing near and heard what he said.

"Excellent!" and turning to her guests she said: "The English lady has doubtless been detained. The Herr Egerton waits to accompany her," and she marshalled her party into walking line.

Myles went back to the Schloss, but he could see no sign of Rose anywhere. She would be obliged to pass through the hall on her way out of the house, so he sat down to wait for her. The Visitors' Book lay on the table beside him, and he began idly to turn over the leaves.

He was not giving much thought to what he was doing, when he heard a voice at his elbow.

He found he was being addressed by Frau Wolff.

"You make a seek in ze book? I also haf make seeks in zis book."

Myles rose at once and made way for her.

"I am not using the book," he said.

Frau Wolff took a step to one side and baulked his intention of getting away.

"Is it ze name of ze Ingleesh Frau vich you seek in ze book?"

Myles met her inquisitive gaze stolidly.

"I was not looking for any one's name," he said, and again tried to move away.

Frau Wolff fired a point-blank question at him:

"Ze Ingleesh Frau is parents wis you, *nicht wahr?*"

All family connections, according to her understanding of English, came under the class of parents. It was a word that she prided herself upon being able to translate.

Myles's face remained expressionless. He did not attempt to answer.

A gleam came into her little black eyes.

"You say nodding. I also speak of zese sings to ze English Frau and she say nodding. But ze names are in zis book."

Myles was inwardly very angry. She was a meddlesome, impertinent woman.

Frau Wolff tapped the book impatiently.

"I vill show you zat it is true," she exclaimed. "I vill find ze names."

A footfall sounded on the stairs. He turned to see Rose hesitating on the lowest step. She was looking at him in surprise.

Frau Wolff was bending over the book. He passed noiselessly behind her back and crossed the hall.

"Let us escape," he said.

Rose walked on towards the open door, and he followed. The courtyard was deserted, and in a few minutes they had gained the shelter of the woods.

Myles looked back at the Schloss.

"It 's not worth while being angry," he said, "but what a detestable woman!"

"Yes," answered Rose.

He glanced at her quickly. She looked flushed and as though something had happened to disturb her. The disquieting idea occurred to him that perhaps she was annoyed at his having thrust his society upon her. He explained the circumstances.

"Thank you for waiting," she said. "I was sorry to be late, but—I could not help it."

He was still doubtful as to whether she was annoyed with him or not.

The morning was close and sultry, and under the thick canopy of the pines the light was soft and dim as twilight. They had now struck into the footpath which led up the steep banks of the Schulterthal, and it gradually grew steeper as it twisted and turned between the bare, straight stems of the trees. On the one side the ground rose precipitously, on the other it fell sheer down to the banks of the mountain stream which roared and thundered over its rocky bed, dashing up volumes of spray as it rushed along.

They climbed for some time in silence. On a small promontory which jutted out from the bank Myles paused, and stepping closer to the edge, looked over.

"You ought to come here, Mrs. Trevor? There 's a waterfall that 's quite worth seeing."

She shook her head.

"I 'm afraid I can't. I can't look over a precipice."

He took a step nearer.

"Oh don't!" she exclaimed. "Do you know the ground under your feet is quite hollow?"

He came back to her side.

"They must often have landslips here," he remarked. "There 's the track of one on the other side. Do you see where the line of it runs down into the gorge?"

They continued their way. Rose was very silent, and Myles felt quite sure that she was annoyed.

The path still led upwards, then it began to descend. It wandered on rather aimlessly for a little while and seemed to break off abruptly.

"We have surely taken a wrong turning," said Rose. They were walking in single file, and she was in advance. "The path stops here. Look! on ahead there is nothing."

"We have to cross over to the other side," said Myles.

"But I don't see any bridge."

"You will in a minute. We can't see it from here. We have to climb down to reach it. Let me help you. I 'll go first and give you something to hold on to."

She was more dependent on the arm which held her up than she was aware of. It was in some places a case of being almost bodily lifted from one ledge of rock to another. She was rather breathless before she reached the level ground at the foot of the cliff.

"And here 's the bridge," said Myles. "A crazy-looking concern. I would n't trust it with a flood on."

They crossed over to the other side, where a narrow stretch of grass ran for some distance along the banks of the stream. Piles of timber were stacked in long lines close to the water's edge, waiting to be floated down to the lower valleys by the winter floods.

"The next bit is a pretty stiff pull," said Myles. "I think you had better sit down here, and rest for a few minutes."

"I 'm not tired," she said.

"Oh—I—thought you were," he answered. "Or else—perhaps you 're not very keen about the walk."

She looked a little startled.

"Why do you say that?"

There had been an inflection in his voice which she did not quite understand. She had somehow made up her mind that this was a type of man who would be very unobservant, and not at all sympathetic. She wondered if she had made a mistake.

She watched him. He was brushing some broken bark off one of the piles of pine logs.

"There. I think that will make a comfortable seat," he said.

She sat down. She had not intended to, but it was rather nice of him to make a seat for her. It struck her how very unsociable she had been, and she felt that an apology was almost due to him.

"I am sorry my being late kept you back." Then she thought of Vilma. "I am afraid I have been a very dull companion."

"I thought I was boring you," he answered simply.

A plant of wild gentians was growing in the moss at her feet. She stooped and picked one of the flowers and played with it absently.

"I—I was worried about something. Something that happened just before I started."

Then she regretted having spoken. It was not likely that he would care whether she was worried or not.

"I am sorry."

There was quite a nice expression in his eyes, and his voice sounded interested. It surprised her so much, that she flushed a little and added hurriedly:

"It was only a stupid thing which most people would have found amusing, but—it was n't to me."

"My little friend again?" asked Myles.

"How did you know?"

For the first time since they had started on their walk a smile crossed her face.

He was glad to see the smile. She had not been bored with him after all: she had not been thinking about him. There was not much perhaps to choose between indifference and dislike, but he answered pleasantly:

"I expect he takes a lot of running after."

Rose twisted the gentian round in her fingers.

"He 's not really a naughty child," she said slowly.

"But full of animal spirits?"

"Yes. And so excitable—just like a little whirlwind. He loves making a noise."

"Is n't that a healthy sign? I should let him take it out that way."

Rose raised her hands and let them fall again with a little gesture of despair.

"But I cannot. This kind of hotel life is ruination to a child. You cannot allow him to get rid of his superfluous vitality in the way that a child ought to do. One has to think of other people."

"Oh, I should n't worry about that; wait until they complain."

"But they have. I mean that 's what happened this morning."

He glanced at her. Her face had clouded over again.

"Did the little chap do anything very terrible?" he asked.

She had not intended to be drawn into explanation. She wondered afterwards how it came about that he had made her talk to him about herself.

"Perhaps it was my fault. I ought to have more authority. He was in one of his wildest moods, singing at the top of his voice, and dancing about all over the place. How can you punish a little thing for being happy? Its body is so full of life it can't keep it in. There was so much noise that I did not hear the door open. I looked round to find the lady from the room below standing close beside me. She was so angry she could hardly speak, and, of course, I knew why. I apologised. I said I was sorry. I scolded Benjie, but she was so busy talking she had no time to listen. She had a beautiful blue parasol in her hand and she waved it in my face and threatened all manner of things. Then she dropped the parasol, and I never noticed Benjie pick it up until I heard the click of the catch as he opened it."

Myles murmured something which she did not hear.

"He ran out on to the balcony, and the parasol caught in the door-way and turned outside in. There was a dreadful sound of snapping wires. I 'm sure all the spokes were broken. It sounds as if it ought to be funny, but it was n't. She went to the bureau and complained—and—the hotel proprietor was n't very nice about it."

"I would n't worry," said Myles. "You 'll find it 'll blow over. She 's made a fuss, and now she 'll settle down. Can't we appease her with a new blue parasol?"

"It would n't end in one. I should have to go about the world continually appeasing people with blue parasols. He 's only three now. What will he do when he is older?"

"School," said Myles, and then saw that he had made a mistake. He tried to better it. "Of course, you 'll hate giving him up. He 's a splendid little chap."

"It 's not that." She turned her head aside and answered slowly: "I would like to give him everything he ought to have, but—" Her voice changed—hardened. "Had n't we better be moving on? I was forgetting the time, and this cannot be interesting to—a stranger."

"On the contrary, it interests me very much."

He showed no signs of wanting to move on. He looked down at the ground, and kept his eyes fixed on his boots.

He spoke rather jerkily.

"Mrs. Trevor, I 've—got a confession to make. I 'm not a stranger. I 'm—the boy—well, as a matter of fact, I came out here to find him."

She turned a puzzled face and frowned a little.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

CHAPTER IX

ROSE TREVOR REFUSES TO ACCEPT

MYLES picked up a fir cone and, throwing it into the stream, watched it sucked under by the water before he answered.

"That woman you found speaking to me in the hall while I was waiting for you to come down-stairs—she was very inquisitive. I don't know what her reasons were or whether she had any, but she was very much excited about my name in the Visitors' Book—and also yours. She had discovered a similarity between them. She said she had spoken to you about it, and you said nothing. I also said nothing, which annoyed her. You thought, of course, that the thing was a coincidence?"

There was no reply. Only a quick movement at his side like the flutter of a startled bird.

"One is apt to wait for an opportunity to

do a thing, then something unexpected crops up and forces you into doing it. People like Frau Wolff have their uses."

He was trying to prepare her, to lead her up to his point of view. She would have none of it. Her voice sounded sharp; a little frightened.

"Will you please tell me exactly what you mean? In what way do you connect my name with yours?"

"Your husband was my cousin—I was his next-of-kin," he said, and then wished he had not blurted it out so suddenly.

The colour flamed up into her cheeks and then died away again. In a swift flash of intuition she understood. The remembrance of the cruel injustice which had been done to her child swept over her. It was this man who had stolen his birthright.

"Do you mean that you are the——"

With a supreme effort she checked the impetuous words which rose to her lips, but he finished the sentence for her.

"I am the man whom you have every reason to hate. Don't judge me hastily."

She struggled to regain her composure. Circumstances had trained her to the habit of self-control. But he would rather have

seen anger flash from her eyes than hear the coldness in her voice.

"I have no intention of judging you." She looked down at the blue gentian which lay on her lap. Its bloom was already beginning to darken. "Mr. Egerton," she said slowly, "I don't think you have behaved fairly to me. You had no right to make my acquaintance under false pretences."

He started.

"Forgive me, but is that true?"

"You knew who I was, and I did not know who you were."

It was so very feminine—a little pathetic. How far had she committed herself? Tenacious of her reserve, had she allowed him to see behind the armour of her defence? He had known and she had not. It was all summed up in that, and he understood.

"My position was a difficult one," he said gravely. "Will you listen to me for a few minutes? I am sorry to have to recall painful memories."

"Is it necessary?" she said. "Nothing can alter the past."

"It is very necessary, It is to alter the past that I am here."

"That can never be," she answered.

He hated his task.

"May I speak?" he said.

She acquiesced silently.

"It is nearly three years since old Benjamin Trevor died. Your husband, who was his only child, predeceased him by a few weeks. At the time of Mr. Trevor's death I was absent from England, but Mr. Ridley, the man who is with me here in Waldhof, was present at the reading of his will. He left everything to my mother. The property was to come to me at her death, and I was to take the name of Trevor added to that of my own."

He paused for a moment.

"The will was acted upon with the best intentions because—no one knew the truth."

He saw the hands which lay so near his own clasp and unclasp each other nervously. He heard her quick, irregular breathing.

"No one knew of my cousin, Cyril Trevor's marriage. No one knew that when he died he left a widow and child."

There was dead silence. Myles waited for her to break it, but she did not. He watched her hands; they told him much. They struggled to speak for her. He went on, wishing his task was finished.

"Old Benjamin Trevor had never told any

one of his son's marriage. It was almost by an accident that the truth was found out.

"Six months ago my mother died. I was again out of England at the time and it was only lately that I was able to attend to business. I found an enormous accumulation of papers belonging to the old man which had never been examined, and I asked Mr. Ridley to help me. At one time he had been private secretary to my uncle, and knew his ways. It was he who made the discovery. A packet of letters was found in the recess of an old desk where I certainly should not have looked myself. They were letters from Cyril Trevor to his father. They told of his engagement, and of his marriage. And——"

For the first time his voice failed him.

"At the end there was a letter in—another handwriting. It was to tell of his death, and —of the birth of his child.

"I can't go on," he said rather huskily. "I don't want to reproach you, but why have you chosen to live this life of isolation? Why did you never allow any of us to know of your existence?"

She drew herself up with a proud gesture.

"You can know little of the real truth if you can ask me that question."

Her eyes flashed now. He was glad. He would rather see her angry than cold. The colour which had such a maddening trick of coming and going under the clear skin flushed her white cheeks. He prided himself upon being the least susceptible of men. He pulled himself together sharply.

"I do know. I respect your pride; but be just. Am I to be held responsible for another man's sins?"

He saw her lips quiver.

"You read Cyril's letters to his father. You did not see the answers he received to them."

"No, but I can understand. Don't speak of them if it pains you."

"I will speak. I must." She threw up her head. "I am as well born as the Trevors. If I had been some disreputable creature whom it was a disgrace to acknowledge, I could not have been treated worse."

She silenced him when he would have spoken with an imperative gesture.

"You ought to know."

He had wanted to spare her, and she would not. She tried to speak calmly. He read beyond the words to the pain and passion: the pent-up revolt against the wrong of these three lonely years.

"You know that I met my husband abroad —that we were in Italy, my aunt and I; that she was my only relation, that my marriage took place at her death-bed at a few hours' notice? The letters told you that?"

"Yes."

"I hardly realised what I had done until it was over. She died happy, thinking that—I was happy. Then came the time—after Cyril had told his father of his marriage. It was terrible. The doubts, the insults, the insinuations, nothing seemed to be too contemptible to throw at me."

Myles raged inwardly. She ought never to have known of these things.

"It went on for weeks—months. Then a fever broke out in the little village where we were staying, and Cyril caught it. We had been living very quietly. He had never made his marriage known, and I—I kept silence because he wished it. He was only ill for a few days, and he was delirious most of the time. Just at the last he was conscious. He made me promise two things. To call the child, if it were a boy, Benjamin after his father, and that I would write to the old man and say that that had been his last wish, and plead for forgiveness.

"It was terribly hard to do; I felt so bitter; I hated the old man. He was like a murderer; but I kept my promise. That was the letter in the strange handwriting which you found amongst the others."

Myles remembered every word of that letter. Pitiful in what was said; more pitiful still in what was left unsaid. The dying appeal of the weak, spoilt man, to the last throwing the burden on her. He had read it with a lump in his throat, not ashamed of the tears which blurred his sight.

"He answered that letter?"

"Yes—I cannot think how any man could bring himself to write such a letter to a woman. He knew that I stood alone. I suppose he wanted to crush out the knowledge of my existence. He distorted every circumstance. Everything was turned against me. At the end he said that his sense of justice to those who came after him would not allow him to burden himself with the claims of a child of whom—he knew nothing."

Her voice broke: she stopped. To Myles's unutterable dismay her composure broke down. She covered her face with her hands and sat trembling; struggling against the emotion which was shaking her from head to foot.

He had never felt so helpless in his life. He did not dare to comfort her. What could he do? He did perhaps the only thing that was possible. He got up and walked to the end of the bank and left her to fight her battle alone.

"Thank you," she said, when he came back. She was a little flushed, but quite composed.

He looked up at the lowering sky.

"I think we 're going to have a thunderstorm," he said.

She made a movement with her hand to the seat beside her, and he sat down again.

"I want to ask you something," she said. "How did you know that I was at Waldhof?"

"I did not know. I thought I was never going to find you. The address on the letters helped me in the first place, but I lost trace of you."

"That sketch? You remember? You had been to the place?"

"Yes. I am afraid it hurt you seeing that. I was sorry about it afterwards, because—well I was almost sure I had found you that first evening."

"How?"

"The child told me his name, and you see I was looking for a little boy called Benjamin."

"What made you come to Waldhof?"

"Well, I believe"—he smiled—"I believe it was the Wasser Kur. My friend, Mr. Ridley, is rather fond of trying experiments in that way. Odd, was n't it? I never dreamt of finding you here."

"I wanted to be lost," she said.

"But you ought n't to have been allowed to get lost. Your own people——"

"There was no one to care. If you are far away and do not answer letters and want to be lost, it is not difficult."

"It has all been a terrible muddle," said Myles.

He felt resentful, and that he owed some one a grudge. He was nervous, too; for the most difficult part of what he had to say was still unsaid, and he did not know how she would take it.

"You know why I wanted to find you? Of course, I give up all claim to the property."

Her whole manner stiffened, and she drew herself up.

"That is quite impossible. I cannot listen to such a thing."

He had expected her to say something of the kind. He did not expostulate or argue.

"I 'm sorry," he said. "I 'd hoped you 'd

have been able to see it in the same light as I did—for the sake of the boy."

He could not have chosen an answer more calculated to appeal to her.

"How can you be so cruel as to say that?" she exclaimed. "Cannot you see for yourself how hateful that old man's money is to me? How he insulted, humiliated me! I could not bring myself to touch it."

"If I died to-morrow the boy would step into my shoes," said Myles. "Don't you think I have a slight claim on him?"

He felt it was treading on dangerous ground to put it that way, but he risked it.

"I cannot listen," she repeated.

Her voice was sharp and strained; she clung desperately to that ghost of the past. Three years of lonely brooding over a wrong must leave its mark, he told himself, and he must have patience. He had gained a hearing, that was all. But it was something. He could afford to wait.

No sound broke the silence which fell between them but the rush of the water as it swept past; the air was hot and sultry, heavy with the oppressive gloom of a gathering storm.

Suddenly, from the cliffs above their heads

came a curious call, like a wild bird's note. It was repeated, echoing from side to side of the Thal.

"What is that?" asked Rose.

Myles stood up. The call rang out again. High against the sky-line he distinguished a figure.

"It 's young Schölan," he said. "I expect he 's been sent to look for us. The Gräfin thinks we 've lost our way."

He picked up her gloves which had fallen and gave them to her.

"I hope you won't let what I 've said spoil your day," he said. "Will you try and not think about it?"

Rudolf's call sounded quite near now. A moment later they heard him clattering down the path.

"I will not let it spoil any one's day," she answered quietly.

CHAPTER X

THE PICNIC AT THE SCHULTERTHAL RESTAURANT

IT was true that Rudolf had been despatched by Ilka to find out what had become of the laggards of her party.

He had started off in a great hurry, but he did not hurry on the way back. He found it an agreeable task helping Mrs. Trevor to climb the precipitous path, and as the Englishman had fallen a few paces behind after the first start, he was allowed to have it his own way.

The restaurant was reached after half an hour's stiff climb. It was a primitive little place, merely a mountain *châlet*, perched on a patch of level ground beside a quaint, slim-spired church overhanging the Schulterthal. A few tables and chairs occupied the square in front of the door, and a Skittle Alley, pro-

tected by a wooden roof, ran along one side of the outer wall.

The view would have been grand if the day had been fine, but the clouds hung low, and distant growls of thunder had been threatening ominously for some time. Almost at the moment that they emerged from the shelter of the pines the heavens were torn asunder above their heads and the rain descended in a sudden deluge.

Rudolf caught Rose by the hand unceremoniously and raced her across the few yards of open space between the trees and the restaurant. He made a dash for the nearest shelter, which happened to be the Skittle Alley. Under its broad roof they were in safety. The rain poured from its overhanging eaves; it was like standing under a miniature Niagara.

"*Gott!* but it waters from above," he exclaimed, shaking a great splash from the sleeve of his tunic. "The Englishman is caught. He was too proud to run."

Rose gave a sharp exclamation. Myles had been a little behind them. She saw him crossing the open ground which she and Rudolf had traversed the minute before, and then a blinding streak of lightning blotted out his figure. A deafening crash of thunder

followed almost instantaneously. She put up her hands before her eyes and shrank back against the wall.

A light laugh from Rudolf, and she looked up to see Myles standing beside her.

"Lucky you escaped that," he said.

The dazzle of the lightning was still in his eyes, and made her face look very white, he thought.

"Rudi! Rudi!" called a voice.

A window was thrown open and Ilka Rentier put out her head.

"Ah! you are all there. I have been looking for you many times. I come."

She disappeared, to appear a moment later running down the steps at the farther end of the Alley, and threw up her hands at sight of Rose standing in a pool of water.

"Oh, you poor drowned ones!" she exclaimed, and called back something through the door. A girl ran out with a large towel and began a vigorous rubbing down of all three.

The buzz of voices and the clatter of knives and forks could be heard from the open windows.

Ilka put her arm through Rose's.

"Come," she said, "you must be so hungry,

and we have already begun to eat. We will go into the Speise Saal."

Greetings were showered upon the late comers as they entered the Saal; chairs were pushed back and places made for them. Rose found herself seated between Rudolf and a young officer of the Kaiser Jägers. Opposite to her sat Vilma, and her expression was the reverse of friendly. It did not lighten when Ilka took possession of the Englishman and carried him off to her end of the table.

The scene inside the low, pine-panelled room was a characteristic one; typical of the country and the light-hearted people. Gay voices and laughing repartee mingled with the crash of the thunder without: the lightning flashed in at the uncurtained windows and caught the glitter of a sword hilt, or danced on the gold of a braided tunic. One moment the room was in semi-darkness—the next quivering in a flame of violet light; and in and out pattered the peasant girls, carrying foaming glasses of beer and the long flat dishes on which were served what the Gräfin called, "The eatings of the country."

Rudolf glanced at the *menu* and handed it to Rose.

"*Forelle?*" he said. "You permit me to

wait upon you?" and he laid two little mountain trout of a most beautiful shade of blue upon her plate.

"They are too pretty to eat," she said.

"Not at all," he answered. "I do not like things ugly. Or things that are half ugly and half pretty. I do not like middlings."

Rose bent over the *menu* card. Even a mountain restaurant considers it necessary to place a *menu* on its table for the mid-day meal.

"*Schmärrn*," she read out. "That is a kind of pudding which the peasants eat. And *Knödels*—ugly little dumplings."

Rudolf made a grimace.

"When I eat such things I will look into your eyes—then I forget that they are ugly."

He was in wild spirits and in the mood to do anything that came into his head. He kept his end of the table in a state of lively anticipation as to what was coming next, and more than once the sound of Rose's soft laugh made Myles look up.

The storm deepened. Peal after peal thundered overhead; at times the noise and dazzle were bewildering. In the middle of a terrific crash Rose felt something brush the back of her hand as lightly as a butterfly's wing.

"Herr Baron!" she said severely.

At the tone of her voice Rudolf leant forward, his eyes dancing.

"No one see that I kiss your hand. I do it so quick," he whispered.

"You may kiss my hand when you say 'Good morning' or 'Good evening,' but not in the middle of a thunder-storm when I 'm not looking. I shall be very angry if you do it again."

Rudolf sighed.

"If you look at me so severiously I will weep. I weep now. Already my eyes begin to be small."

"You are just like a mischievous child. It is no use scolding you."

"No use at all," he agreed readily. He raised his glass and touched it with his lips. "I drink to the 'Lady of my Heart'! The only one in all the world whom I have ever loved."

"Oh! What about Editha, and Thérèse, and Wilhelmina, and—all the others?"

He put down his glass and helped himself to *Knödel.*

"I have two hearts," he said. "One for quick loves and one for loves that stay."

What further revelations he was going on

to make regarding the depth of his affections were interrupted by a hand being laid on his shoulder, and he looked up to find his sister standing behind him.

"Rudi, what are we to do with all these people?" she said. "It continues to rain without ceasing. We must make an amusement."

Rudolf pushed back his chair and took a cigarette out of his case.

"The *gnädige Frau* permits me?" he said before lighting it.

Ilka patted his shoulder.

"Think of something, Rudi. We must make an amusement. What are we to do?"

"*Liebling*," he murmured affectionately. "But it gives me great pleasure to do nothing. I am learning much English. Also there is already an amusement provided for us. The wife of the Herr Hauptman is about to play the piano. *Gott Himmel!* but she makes much exercise of her body when she plays. She go so! Poof! Poof! Poof!" and he raised himself up and down in his chair. "She is not beautiful, but her hands, they please me. I find them *appetitlich*, so I watch her."

Ilka shook him.

"We cannot listen all day to the Frau

Hauptman breaking the piano," she said. She whispered something in Rose's ear.

The latter hesitated, and then said:

"Herr Baron, will you not do what your sister wishes?"

Rudolf was on his feet in an instant. He laid his hand on his heart and bowed low. He did not say anything, but slipped quietly out of the room.

Ilka sat down in the chair he had vacated.

"He will make a little play," she said, "and we guess what it is."

A few minutes passed and Rudolf came in again. He swept back the chairs and tables against the wall and cleared a space by the door, then hurried out. He was absent for longer the next time, and reappeared staggering under the weight of an enormous wooden tub which he bumped down on the floor.

He looked round as though in search of an inspiration.

"Your handkerchief?" he cried, appealing to Rose, and she gave it to him.

In half a minute he had folded and fashioned it into the form of a small white bird which he placed on the floor about two feet in front of the tub. He spoke a few words in an under-

tone to the lady at the piano and again vanished.

Almost before the audience had time to speculate as to the meaning of the tub and the handkerchief, the door was flung open and a figure strode in. A white sheet fell in statuesque folds from its shoulders; an old metal wine-cooler was turned upside down on its head, with the handles dangling over its ears, and a sword was girded to its side with a piece of string.

The wife of the Herr Hauptman struck a crash of chords on the piano, and the figure opened its mouth and burst into a sonorous recitative which echoed through the small room like a trumpet blast. Words and music were made up on the spur of the moment and had no connection with anything in particular. Crash! Another chord from the piano, and the figure stepped majestically into the tub.

Shouts of "Bravo! Lohengrin! Lohengrin!" resounded from all sides, and some one dashed forward to secure the white swan which had been made out of the English lady's handkerchief.

But that was not part of Rudolf's game. The handkerchief was safely tucked into the

breast of his tunic before any one could reach it.

"My *Gage d'Amour*," he cried, laughing.

Ilka clapped her hands to restore order.

"We will have another game. I have thought of one." She jumped up. "Now," she said, holding up her finger. "We play this game so! All the ladies remain seated in a circle and one gentleman will offer to go out of the room. He will look first to see where all the ladies are sitting. Then a bandage is put over his eyes, and when he is brought in again he must try to find the lady whom he loves best for to kiss her."

A chorus of assent greeted this suggestion.

"Who will be the first gentleman to wish to go out?" she cried.

The words were hardly uttered before every man in the room was making a dash for the door. They flattened themselves against it in a solid block, but Rudolf had managed to lay hold of the handle and held on to it. He had had every intention of making use of his advantage himself, when he saw that Mr. Egerton had not joined in the scrimmage and was leaning against the wall a few inches from him looking rather bored.

In an instant he had the door wrenched

open, had caught Myles by the arm, and had shoved him outside into the passage.

He came back and threw himself down in a chair beside Rose.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed. "We will now see how the Englishman does kissing."

Ilka ordered a general post, and every one changed places.

"We deceive him," she whispered. "Such is part of the game."

She beckoned to the young Kaiser Jäger who had been sitting next Rose at lunch and told him to ask the Herr Englishman if he was prepared to come in.

He opened the door about a quarter of an inch and called out the only two English words he knew, which he had picked up at tennis.

"Read-e-e? Pl-a-y-ee?"

An answer came back in the affirmative.

Rose was perhaps the only one in the room to whom it came as a surprise. She had quite expected that Myles would take the opportunity of quietly disappearing.

He allowed himself to be led in blindfold and stood with his back to the door, facing the audience.

No one moved.

The two peasant girls who had been waiting

at lunch were busy clearing away the dishes. They also paused to look on. One was a plain-looking girl, the other was pretty.

The pretty girl dropped a spoon, and it fell noisily on the floor. Myles turned round quickly, and, stooping down, kissed her on both cheeks.

His unexpected manner of getting himself out of the difficulty was received with rounds of applause.

The girl laughed. She took the incident at its proper value and, unembarrassed, bustled out of the room with her pile of plates.

Rudolf nodded approvingly.

"The Englishman knows how to play the game. He kiss the pretty girl."

"I was surprised he consented to play any game," answered Rose. "I expected when you put him outside that he would run away."

"Why did you credit me with so little courage?" said a voice at her elbow.

She looked round.

"Mr. Egerton, who blindfolded you?"

"I did it myself."

"Ah! Some people have wonderful sight. They can almost see through a stone wall."

He was carefully rolling up the scarf which had been tied over his eyes.

"And some people run their heads up against stone walls. Perhaps I am doing the latter."

Ilka called to him to help her in the arrangement of a new game, and he turned away.

The storm thundered on; the rain fell in a steady deluge. It was late in the afternoon before the faintest break lightened the heavy clouds.

"We must start at once," declared Ilka, who felt that she had pretty well exhausted every form of amusement.

"But the wife of the Herr Hauptman is *jausening*, having afternoon tea," said Rudolf, who was never in a hurry to move when he happened to be sitting next to the person he liked.

"It is for the second time that she is *jausening*," exclaimed Ilka. "You must tell her to hurry. Make her come, Rudi. If she will not come quickly, bring her in your arms."

"*Aber nein!* not in my arms. That would not be agreeable to me."

He returned from giving his message and shrugged his shoulders.

"She will not hurry: she is *jausening* with both hands. She has little in her head, so she puts much in her body."

"What am I to do?" said Ilka.

Rudolf put his head on one side and looked at her.

"I will wait to escort the Frau Hauptman," he said. "I will wait until she has finished *jausening*." And Ilka, who was anxious to get her party under way, did not stop to wonder at his offer.

He turned an appealing face to Rose.

"She is a most formeedable woman. I am very much afraid of her. Will you not help me?"

Rose laughed.

"Shall I stay and protect you?" she said.

"You will?" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Yes, if you like. Whilst she is finishing her tea I will get one of the maids to pin up my skirt. It is too long. I wonder if I will be able to make her understand my bad German?"

"But I will explain," said Rudolf, with suspicious alacrity.

He called to the pretty girl who had helped Myles out of his difficulty and said something to her so quickly that Rose did not hear what it was.

The girl smiled and nodded and beckoned to her to follow her. She led the way to the

kitchen, and, producing a large pin-cushion, began an elaborate arrangement of tucking up which appeared to Rose to take a very long time.

When she returned to the Saal she found it deserted except for Rudolf, who was walking up and down smoking a cigarette.

"I am ready" she said, glancing down at her shortened skirts. "She took a long time. Shall we start? Where is the Frau Hauptman?"

"She is gone. She has run away very fast."

"Gone! I thought we were to wait for her?"

Rudolf waved his cigarette towards the open window.

"It was necessary for me to send her away. If not, she would walk with us and that would have been impossible! I say to her that I have seen her husband give his cloak to the Baronin Vilma. It was not so, of course; but it make her run away to catch him. She runs very fast. It is true that she has the legs of an ostrich."

CHAPTER XI

ROSE AND RUDOLF DO NOT RETURN

VILMA SEYBELL had determined that Mr. Egerton should be her companion on the return journey, and by a succession of small manœuvres she managed to get her own way. He proved a very quiet companion, but that did not strike her as peculiar. He was never demonstrative, and her experience of Englishmen was, that they were not inclined to take the initiative in talking. They preferred a woman to do that for them. She was quite pleased to talk whilst he listened, but she would have been very much annoyed had she known that he retained but the faintest recollection of what she had been talking about, and that from start to finish of the walk his mind had been entirely occupied by his own thoughts.

If Myles had been told that Vilma Seybell was in love with him he would have been both surprised and annoyed. He was not a

vain man, and the attention he had paid to her the preceding winter in Vienna had seemed to him the natural tribute a pretty woman would expect from any man who was thrown constantly in her society.

Vilma had thought he had meant a great deal more. In her own selfish way she was in love with him. When he unexpectedly appeared at Waldhof, she had at once rushed to the conclusion that she was the cause of his coming. But when the days went by and nothing happened, she did not know what to think of it. His manner puzzled her, for he never went out of his way to seek her society. He seemed quite as pleased to talk to one woman as to another. She did not particularly mind his talking to other women so long as it was not to Mrs. Trevor. Of Mrs. Trevor she was intensely jealous. From the first she had had a presentiment that Myles for some reason was interested in her, and she hated her accordingly.

Myles parted with Vilma at the door of the Schloss. He did not see her, or any of the returned party again, until he entered the Speise Saal at supper time.

He was late, and the room was, as usual at that hour, crowded. His first glance round

told him that Rose was not sitting in her accustomed place, and Rudolf also was absent. Ilka Rentier, who had found the day's expedition exhausting, had retired to her own rooms.

Vilma's eyes plainly invited him to join her party, but he either did not, or would not, understand her meaning. Mr. Ridley was sitting at a table by himself and he joined him.

"My dear chap," he remarked, as he drew in a chair. "What are you doing? Is this a new kind of Patience?"

Charles had cleared a space on the tablecloth in front of him, and arranged on it, in symmetrical order, were rows of small squares of grey flannel.

"I 'm choosing a suit of clothes," he said. "The last few days I 've suffered so excessively from the heat that I am quite sure I am losing weight. It is most distressing."

Myles fingered one of the squares of flannel. It was a fad of Charles's to buy clothes wherever he went.

"Who 's to be your tailor this time? Local talent? I 'd give him a pattern to copy if I were you."

Charles fidgeted uneasily. Frau Wolff had overheard him making inquiries about a tailor and had at once made overtures of help which

he had accepted. He was not sure whether Myles would approve. He explained a little, but did not mention Frau Wolff's name.

Myles listened perfunctorily and ate his supper. When he had finished, he lit a cigarette and smoked more than half of it in silence. Charles was discussing the point as to whether the flannel suit ought to have a double-breasted coat or a single, when Myles asked a question which showed that his mind had wandered from the subject of flannel suits.

"Charles," he said suddenly, "what kind of a man was Cyril Trevor?"

Mr. Ridley paused in the rearrangement of his row of patterns, and looked up with some astonishment.

"You never knew him? Oh no, of course, neither you did. Cyril Trevor?" he repeated thoughtfully. "He was—he was—extremely good-looking."

Myles took his cigarette out of his mouth and sat staring at it.

"The kind of man a woman would make a hero of?"

Charles cleared his throat. He always found it difficult to discuss any subject which verged on sentiment; but under the primness of his manner there lay a very strong vein of

sentiment. It gave him at times an insight into human nature of which he was only dimly conscious himself.

He crumbled his bread into little heaps, and spoke with more than his usual careful precision.

"I think Cyril possessed a great attraction for women. He demanded a great deal from them. I have not gone into such matters deeply, but it has frequently occurred to me that diffidence in a man is not appreciated. In fact"—a faint colour tinged his cheek—"it is misunderstood for weakness by the other sex. Cyril would give a woman the impression of being strong and masterful, whereas in my opinion he was not a strong character. And it was in his nature to avoid responsibility."

He stopped, a little aghast at his own eloquence.

Myles leant forward with his arms on the table.

"He had no right to marry in the way he did. It was a hole-and-corner business."

Charles flushed.

"And yet there was a kind of—romantic sentiment about the death-bed marriage. Don't you think so?"

"Hang the sentiment!" growled Myles.

"What good did he do by marrying her? Kept her living out there under a cloud. Nice way of looking after a woman."

"But, you see, Cyril was dependent on his father; he had no money."

"Why the devil did n't he set to work to make some?" Myles pushed aside a plate impatiently. "He had no right to keep his marriage secret. It was a piece of criminal selfishness. Why did n't he think of her?"

"Yes. Yes, of course," agreed Charles. It was unusual of Myles to speak so hotly. "But if the story of his marriage had not been discovered, the consequences would have been still more regrettable." He glanced at Myles expectantly. "Now that our search has been successful, I suppose—I suppose that you will explain?"

"Mrs. Trevor knows who I am," said Myles, shortly.

Charles's eyes grew round. Inquiry was written all over his face.

"Was she very much surprised?" he asked.

"I think she was."

Charles was puzzled and a little hurt. Considering the share he had had in bringing about the present state of affairs, he thought he was entitled to a certain amount of confidence.

Myles sat staring at the table-cloth, and he cast about in his mind for something to say which would give him a clue to his thoughts.

"Is it your intention to remain on at Waldhof?" he asked presently.

Myles started. He had forgotten Charles.

"Remain on at Waldhof? Yes. You don't want to go away, do you? You 've only just begun the Cure."

Charles asked no more questions. He knew enough of Myles to realise that whatever plans he had in his head he would develop according to his own methods.

Charles did not wish to leave Waldhof. There was the Cure, and his new suit of clothes, and a variety of small interests in view. He did not like to have his plans upset. It would be best to leave Myles to manage his business in his own way.

He gathered up his little heap of flannel patterns and rose from the table.

"I have some letters to write, and I will go to my own room," he said. "The music and noise downstairs in the evening are very distracting."

Myles sat on for a few minutes longer. Vilma and her party were leaving the Saal, and he did not wish to be mixed up with them.

He thought he had given them plenty of time to scatter; but when he came out on to the steps, he found several men lounging about smoking, and Vilma, with her back to him, was talking vivaciously.

He paused unobserved in the shadow of the doorway. He was an excellent German scholar and he understood perfectly well what she was saying.

She was coupling together the names of Rudolf Schölan and Mrs. Trevor, and drawing conclusions from their absence. She possessed a cynical glibness of speech which had earned her a character for saying smart things. Sometimes they were amusing; sometimes they were only spiteful. The sarcasm of her remarks on Rudolf's reputation for gallantry called forth a protest from an officer who was standing near. He was a personal friend of Rudolf's, and from his standpoint defended him with the tolerance which he considered his due. The speakers lost sight of the broadness of their views in the heat of argument. Vilma shrugged her shoulders superciliously. Was not Rudolf in the wildest set in Vienna? she repeated. Were not his love affairs and his hairbreadth escapes the wonder of Society?

She scoffed and laughed, twisting meanings this way and that.

To hear Rose's name brought into this conversation infuriated Myles. To think that even casually it should be associated with the talk lightly bandied from mouth to mouth was intolerable. With the fastidiousness of a more than usually fastidious nature, he had the Englishman's deeply rooted prejudice against hearing his women-kind discussed in public. He was disgusted as well as angry.

He turned back into the restaurant and left it again by another door which led out into the garden. He walked backwards and forwards, up and down the wet pathway. His anger cooled, but he was conscious of a vague uneasiness. His mind continually reverted to the fact that Rudolf Shölan and Rose had been the last of the party to start on the homeward journey, and the Frau Hauptman, when she rejoined the others, had given no explanation as to why she had left her companions behind. He had no grounds for thinking that they had not returned safely. He would like to have made inquiries, but he shrank from doing so. Why should he start an inquiry? It might be resented.

The wet garden was dark and cheerless, and

he put his hand in his pocket, but his pipe was not there. He remembered that he had left it in his own room, and went in search of it.

The Schloss was a rambling old place, badly lit even in the daytime, and at night it was not difficult to mistake one passage for another. He was suddenly brought up with a start to find that he had taken a wrong turning, and was in a part of the building which was strange to him. He turned, and was going back when he heard a sound which arrested his attention. It was the sound of a child sobbing, and it came from a door which stood ajar, not many paces from where he stood.

There was something peculiarly plaintive in the sound. It was as if the child had sobbed itself into a state of hopeless misery which nothing could appease. Was the child alone, he wondered? He felt that he could not pass on without finding out what it meant. He took a few steps back towards the door, and at the same moment it was thrown open and Leopoldina came out hurriedly.

Her usually placid face showed signs of distress, and she glanced this way and that with a helpless expression of uncertainty. Catching sight of the Englishman, she ran up to him without a moment's hesitation.

At first Myles failed to grasp the meaning of what she was saying. She was excited, and lapsed so frequently into her local *patois* that she was almost unintelligible. The repeated reiteration of her mistress's name, her gesticulations and signs toward the room she had just left, gave him the impression that she was appealing to him for help.

He followed her to the door.

"Has your mistress not returned?" he asked in German, pausing on the threshold.

The girl shook her head vigorously, and pointed through the window in the direction of the distant hills.

At the sound of Myles's voice a little huddled heap which lay buried amongst the pillows of the bed in the far corner of the room sprang up, and a tear-stained face was turned towards him. There was a sharp cry of "Muvver," and by the light of the solitary candle he saw Benjie running across the uncarpeted boards.

"Muvver—where 's muvver?" rang out the cry. "I seed you take her away. Where 's muvver?"

Myles bent down and lifted the child in his arms. The quivering of the little body as it clung to him, and the clasp of the little hands round his neck, thrilled him strangely. Tears

had blistered red patches on the rounded cheeks, and the wide-opened eyes were burning with excitement.

He sat down on the edge of the bed.

"It 's all right," he said. "Mother 's coming back soon."

His voice was wonderfully gentle. The strong arms which encircled him gave Benjie a feeling of indescribable comfort.

"Muvver, muvver," he sobbed, but something of the strain of misery had died out of his voice.

"Yes, it 's all right. You listen to me and don't cry."

"I 'm lishenin'—But it 's muvver I want. I seed her go away. You tooked her." Sobs broke out afresh.

"And I 'm going to bring her back again."

At the absolute confidence of the tone, Benjie loosened his hold and held up his head.

"When are you goin' to bring her back?"

"As soon as you stop crying. Mother would be very unhappy if she knew you were awake and crying like this, would n't she?"

Benjie gulped and tried to swallow his tears.

"That 's right," said Myles, cheerfully. "You 'll go to sleep, and when you wake up mother will be here."

Benjie caught hold of his collar and scanned his face searchingly.

"You promise quite sure?" he said.

"Quite sure."

The small face puckered anxiously.

"Muvver always promises sings wis a kiss."

Myles stooped his head.

"Very well, I 'll promise the same as mother.

Benjie rubbed his cheek with the back of his hand, and slipping from the arms which held him, burrowed down amongst the bedclothes.

"I 'll be good," he said, laying his head on the pillow. I 'm not cryin'. I 'm shuttin' my eyes very tight; 'member, you 've promised.

"All right, I 'll keep my promise," answered Myles. He was leaving the room when a quavering voice called after him.

"Please, please, may I has Curly Kate? I can't go to sleep wisout Curly Kate."

Myles came back.

"What 's that?" he asked.

Benjie pointed to the table.

"Muvver always gives me Curly Kate. I can't go to sleep wisout Curly Kate."

Myles laughed, and laid the battered old doll beside him.

"There now. You 'll sleep like a top." And he left the room.

CHAPTER XII

MYLES MAKES A DISCOVERY

MYLES had no intention of raising an alarm. Whilst he had been soothing the frightened child his brain had been working rapidly, and before leaving the room he had decided what he intended to do.

The fact that Rudolf was also missing reassured him. Under certain conditions Rudolf might be what Vilma said he was, but Myles felt pretty certain that he was to be trusted. If some accident had occurred, he was quite capable of rising to an emergency.

Many conjectures flashed through his mind as to what might have happened. The path in some places was in a very bad state, and the torrential rain that had fallen had perhaps caused a temporary breakdown. He hoped that it was nothing more serious, but the idea of an accident haunted him whilst he was making his few preparations to start on the climb up the Thal.

He decided to go alone. He was habitually self-reliant, but in this case would most likely have asked some one to accompany him had not Vilma's spiteful remarks rankled. He attached no meaning to what she had said, but gossip flew like wildfire in a small community.

He always kept himself in good training. The climb, which had taken two hours in the morning, when there had been no reason to hurry, could be done in half that time. He provided himself with a stout alpenstock and his flask, into which he put some brandy and water. As he passed through the old stone hall he picked up a small lantern which stood on a ledge by the door. He had often noticed it standing there, and he looked to see if there was a candle in it.

The night seemed very dark as he went out, but as he left the lights of the hotel behind him his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom. The roar of the stream thundering down the deep gorge would have been guide sufficient to give him his bearings.

The storm had again gathered: the rain lashed in his face and the wind whistled past his ears. The rapid movement, the suppressed excitement under which he was labouring, sent the blood tingling through his

veins. When he came to the bank above the spot where the stream had to be crossed, he calculated that he had done about half the distance, and he had discovered nothing. He knew that he had not diverged from the path; they must still be on the other side of the bridge.

The descent down to the water's edge was a case of trusting to luck, as the darkness about his feet was dense. Once he left level ground, he probed it with his alpenstock and advanced cautiously step by step. The flooded stream threw up blinding volumes of spray as it raced past, but the gloom in the gorge was so deep that he could not see the water, though the noise of it was deafening. According to his calculations, he ought to be able to touch the supports of the bridge almost from where he was standing. On his way up that morning he had noticed the beams sunk deeply into the banks on either side. Still probing, he struck wood, and he knew that he must be standing close to the brink of the water. It was not so dark but that some faint outline of the bridge ought to be visible; he strained his eyes, but was only conscious of blank space, and when he waved his stock from side to side it did not come into contact with anything.

He moved a few steps, and crouching down on the ground with his back to the wind he lit the lantern, sheltering it under cover of his coat. Then he crept to the edge of the bank.

The flame flickered feebly at first, then flashed up with a sudden spurt, and threw a line of light across the boiling surface of the stream.

The bridge was gone! Almost at his feet the rotting beams which had held it to the bank showed their jagged ends above the white foam which swirled round them. He waved the lantern high and low. Not a sign of wreckage was visible, but out in mid-stream a shape loomed black and unfamiliar.

He wondered if his eyesight was playing him false. He had no recollection of having noticed a mass of rock there before, and it lay exactly in the line of where the bridge had been. Then in a flash, puzzled surprise changed to horror. He knew what had happened. There had been a landslip. From what height it had fallen or what awful devastation it had carried in its wake he could not tell, for the opposite bank was indistinguishable. Try as he could to pierce the gloom, he was met by a wall of blackness.

Sickening possibilities presented themselves. The landslip must have happened whilst Rudolf and Rose were descending the path. Had they been caught unawares and swept off the face of the cliff, or had they been trapped on the other side of the devastating line and made their way back to the restaurant? These two questions surged in his brain. Once more he flashed the lantern. And its light fell on the angry tumult of foam and lashing waters. To attempt to cross to the other side was impossible. He lowered his arm as a cloud of spray swirled over his head, and drew his hand across his eyes to brush off the drops of wet. When he looked again, it was with startled surprise. A flame of fire had suddenly sprung out from the opposite bank. It danced for a few seconds against the inky darkness, and then vanished; it was gone before he could be certain that the thing had really happened. He waved the lantern above his head and shouted, but with the noise of the water beating in his ears he could hear no answering voice.

"I hope to God it means that she 's safe." He used the single pronoun unconsciously.

Unaided he could do nothing; he must go back to Waldhof and procure help.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCERNING THE ADVENTURES OF RUDOLF AND ROSE

RUDOLF and Rose were quite twenty minutes behind the others in starting from the restaurant.

Rose lost some time in scolding Rudolf for his duplicity regarding the wife of the Herr Hauptman, but it was a waste of time and words. She scolded in vain.

"It was necessary that I make her to run away," he repeated unblushingly.

When she suggested that if they hurried they might overtake the others, he did not respond with alacrity.

"But why? There is no necessity to hasten. It is more quick to descend a mountain than to climb to the top of it."

They had only just started, when a child ran out from the back of the house and held up to them a dish full of wild strawberries.

She was a quaint little creature, in a long skirt which almost hid her bare feet, and her sun-bleached hair was brushed tightly back and hung in a thickly pleated pigtail to below her waist. She bobbed a curtsy, and said something shyly to Rudolf.

"She asks us to buy the *Erdbeeren*. Would you like them?"

"They would please my little boy," said Rose. "How can we carry them? They would all jump out of that dish."

"But I will return and seek for something better in which to carry them," answered Rudolf. He took the child's hand, and she trotted along with him as he went back to the restaurant.

He was away for so long that Rose regretted having expressed a desire to have the strawberries. She did not wish to be late in getting back. Benjie would probably refuse to be put to bed until she returned.

When Rudolf at length reappeared, he was full of apologies for having kept her waiting. He carried the strawberries in a little basket.

"The Hausfrau gave it to me," he explained. "But I had to make much love to her."

Once fairly started on their way, they found that the descent was more difficult than they

had expected. The pathway had almost disappeared; it was little else than a slush of sand and gravel and running water. Scrambling, sliding, slipping, they at last came in sight of the bridge. Rose paused and looked down at the spot where she and Myles had rested on their way up, and saw that the water was already creeping round the pine logs on which they had sat. The path took a slanting curve past the bridge, and then zigzagged back at sharp angles down the cliff side. At the turn of one angle the bank appeared very treacherous, and she looked round for Rudolf, who had helped her over every difficulty.

He was standing, gazing upwards to where a volley of loose stones had fallen the moment before. He appeared to be listening.

"It is thunder," said Rose. "I hear it."

He held up his hand, and the quick movement gave her a warning of coming danger. He glanced above and below, measuring as it were every inch of the ground, then he sprang down to where she was standing.

"An avalanche!" he exclaimed. "Quick! We must cross the river before it catch us."

How he managed to get his companion down the cliff side in the time he did was a

triumph of strength and nerve. He never made a mistake; he never put a foot wrong, and she trusted him blindly.

They gained the level ground and raced for the bridge. Once across it they would be comparatively safe.

"We will do it!" cried Rose excitedly.

The words were hardly out of her mouth when Rudolf threw his arms round her and dragged her back.

"It is upon us!"

He flung her under the shelving slope of the bank and knelt over her, trying to shelter her with his body from the hail of stones and gravel which rattled all round them.

The crash of falling timber and the heavy, sullen roar sounded ominously near. On it came—a huge mass ploughing its way downwards to the steep ridge overhanging the Thal. Would it sweep to one side, or overwhelm them? That was the terrible question which hung in the balance during those few seconds of breathless suspense.

There was a terrific shock and the grinding crash of rock striking rock. The great mass had hurled itself into mid-stream and lay broken and shattered by the impetus of its fall. The water rose into the air like a water-

spout, and then fell hissing back in showers of foam and spray.

"*Gott sei dank!*" cried Rudolf, springing to his feet. "We are saved!"

The danger was past. They were safe, but they were trapped. The bridge was gone. It had been smashed into matchwood and borne out of sight, and the pathway down which they had come had been swept away.

Rose did not at first take in the full meaning of their plight. Rudolf had stood between her and the danger. She looked over his shoulder and saw what had happened.

"The bridge!" she cried, aghast. "It has gone!"

"But we are alive," he answered. "What matters all else? It has been a great escape. We might have wakened up to find that we were dead."

He stepped out from the bank. Heavy drops of rain were beginning to fall, the storm was gathering again.

"It is necessary that we seek for some shelter," he said. Even as he spoke a glare of lightning flamed overhead, followed by a crash of thunder, and down swept the rain in torrents.

"Oh, let us go on!" said Rose. "We must

get back to Waldhof. I don't mind the storm."

He shook his head.

"It is altogether impossible to return to Schloss Waldhof except that we cross the water. On this side there is no road."

"But what are we to do?" she asked in alarm. "We cannot get back to the restaurant. The path is gone."

"When we do not return some one will come to seek for us.

She still protested.

"Even if they do come, how are they to help us? If we cannot cross, they cannot."

Rudolf shrugged his shoulders.

"If they have intelligence they will find out a way. *Liebe Frau*," he added earnestly, "I will guard you so that no harm comes to you. There is a shelter near where you will be safe. It is where the woodmen live when they work in the forest. I take you there."

The narrow strip of ground, where the fallen timber was piled, ran for a short distance along the side of the stream, then ended abruptly, blocked by the cliff which jutted out into the water.

He pointed upwards.

A rough wooden hut was built into a deep

cleft running back into the rock. It was overshadowed by the trees, and was almost the colour of its surroundings, but Rudolf's sharp eyes had noticed it in passing.

They climbed up to it by rude steps cut in the bank, and found that the door was unbarred. It pushed open easily and they peered in. The earthen floor was dry, and there was a rough bench at one side; a few tools were heaped in a corner.

Rose sank down on the bench. It was something to feel that the ground under her feet was firm, for there had been a horrible feeling of insecurity about that crumbling bank below. She watched Rudolf making a careful examination of the place, and there was not an inch of it he did not inspect.

"What are you looking for?" she asked.

"I look to find some way to make a light. It may be that the darkness comes before we are discovered."

"Oh, I hope not! How dreadful! And there is nothing?"

He took out his match-box and opened it. There were only three matches. He put it quickly back again, but not before she had seen.

"What time is it now, Herr Baron?" Her voice sounded depressed.

"It approaches the hour of seven. Are you hungry? Ah! the *Erdbeeren*." He put the basket of wild strawberries on the bench beside her. "I fear they make but a poor supper."

How he had managed to save them was a marvel, but they were shaken into the consistency of jam. She made a pretence of eating to please him. He was so genuinely distressed on her account. She realised that this gay, light-hearted boy, for he was little else, had two sides to his character. Just now he was the trusted companion; thoughtful, considerate, the essence of chivalry, thinking only of what he could do to make her position more bearable. Unfastening his military overcoat, which was strapped across his shoulders, he arranged it on the hard bench so as to make a more comfortable seat.

She smiled up at him.

"Thank you. What good care you take of me!" Then she added: "Do you really think they will come and look for us? Perhaps they won't discover that we are missing."

"Of a certainty they will come," answered Rudolf, cheerfully. "I sit here and look for them"; and he squatted down by the open door like a watch-dog on duty.

His hopefulness was a good deal assumed: it was highly probable that they would have to remain where they were for an indefinite time. The suggestion that their absence might not be discovered was possible, for it would be taken for granted that they had returned a little later than the rest of the party, and if they did not appear at supper it would not cause alarm. Supper at Schloss Waldhof was an informal meal, and people came and went as they pleased.

To remain inactive was not to Rudolf's liking, but he had no alternative. He carried a very level head on his shoulders, and he had no intention of risking the safety of his companion by an attempt either to cross the stream without help, or to fight away to Waldhof through the storm and darkness. It was a case of waiting until help came, and the nearer they remained to the scene of the disaster the better.

They sat on patiently, watching the light fade, and Rudolf talked to keep his companion's spirits from flagging.

The storm seemed to be working round them in a circle and was never silent for long. Every few minutes the lightning flared along the dark sides of the Thal, and lit up the

surface of the water and the wild tossing branches of the pine trees which crowned the ridge on the opposite bank. Above the din of the hurrying flood the thunder echoed from rock to rock.

In spite of Rudolf's hopefulness, Rose felt that the prospect was not cheering. Mentally and physically the day had strained her nerves. She tried valiantly to respond to his efforts; he looked so distressed when she did not.

"What is that sound we hear?" she said, rousing herself. "Like bells—a great many bells, all ringing together. Listen! It seems to come up from the valley."

"But yes. It is the peasants ringing the bells in the churches."

"Why are they ringing them? It cannot be a *Festtag* in this storm?"

Between the thunder peals and above the water's roar, rose at intervals the wild, sweet jangle of bells. The sound was borne this way and that like voices crying out in the storm.

Rudolf was leaning against the lintel of the door with his arms folded across his chest. He did not answer at once.

"What does it mean?" she repeated.

"It is the Angels fighting the Devil," he answered gravely.

"What are they fighting for?"

"For the lives of men. When a storm comes in these mountains, the peasants they say the Devil walks seeking for some one to kill."

"But the bells? What have they got to do with it?"

"The bells are the Angels. They go out into the storm and fight with the Devil. When the Devil hears the bells he is afraid —he hides himself."

"And they believe that? It is a very comforting idea. I shall always think of it now when I hear the bells ringing in a storm. Do you know any more stories? Tell me some." She gave a little shiver. "Not about— devils. It is getting so dark. Something cheerful."

Rudolf possessed a vivid imagination and a fund of anecdotal resource. It mattered little whether the stories he told were true, or superstitious peasant legends; if he could amuse her, that was all he cared for. For two long hours he strove to lighten the tedium of the weary watch, and when it grew so dark that he could hardly see his hand in front of

him, his voice was still as cheery and his gaiety as light as it had been at the beginning of the day.

Rose spoke seldom, and as the time crept on she lapsed more and more into silence. She was deadly tired. Her head felt heavy and stupid, and Rudolf's voice sounded now near, and now far away; at times she lost it entirely. She had drifted into semi-unconsciousness when something roused her with a start. She sat up. The darkness enveloped her like a mantle, and everything was silent. She no longer felt Rudolf's presence near.

"Where are you?" she cried. Stumbling to her feet she groped forward with outstretched hands.

His voice answered from outside the hut. In another instant he was by her side.

"A light has appeared," he said. "It is across the water. Ah! do you perceive? It comes once more."

"I see!" she exclaimed. "It is moving. Now it has gone. No—there it is again! Do you think it is a signal—some one come to look for us? What can we do?"

She felt Rudolf's arm brushed against her shoulder.

"What can we do?" she repeated, almost

shaking him. "How can we send them back an answer?"

She heard him laugh, and knew that his quick brain had caught some happy inspiration.

"I have already thought of how to do such a thing. But yes; of course we will send them a message."

Following immediately on his words came a crackling sound as though voluminous sheets of crisp note-paper were being rumpled up. Then the scratching of a match and the flicker of a flame, which was speedily extinguished by the wind.

The momentary illumination showed Rudolf bending down in the act of striking another match.

"Oh do, do be careful!" she cried. "Remember that you have only three!"

The second match shared the fate of the first.

"Wait. Let me help. I will hold my skirt so as to keep off the draught. Now—try once more. I dare hardly breathe," she whispered. "It must catch this time—it must!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Rudolf. He is a good one—he lives!"

The spluttering flame of the third match caught an end of paper, and the crackling sheets burst into a blaze.

The little beacon fire did not last for more than a few seconds and died down as suddenly as it had risen. They leant forward, straining their eyes to pierce the darkness and see if any message came back in answer to their signal. Rudolf was the first to catch sight of a small speck of light. It was not stationary, but was waved from side to side.

The glow from the charred papers showed him the outline of Rose's figure. He caught her hand and wrung it impulsively.

"Have no longer any fear, *gnädige Frau*," he cried. "There is no doubt that the light is a signal to us."

"Do you really think so? It has gone again. Perhaps it was only one of the peasants, and they would not know anything about our being lost."

"It would not be a peasant," answered Rudolf, emphatically. "They carry not lights. They have eyes like cats which can see in the darkness. No, it was some one who seeks for us. It may be that they return to Waldhof again to find means to cross the water."

"I wonder who it was?" said Rose.

"Perhaps it was the Englishman," said Rudolf.

He spoke carelessly, but Rose knew that the same thought had been hers. At the back of her mind, subconsciously as it were, the idea of rescue had been associated with Myles. She did not express her thoughts.

"How fortunate that you had those letters in your pocket. I hope you did not mind burning them."

"Not at all," answered Rudolf, airily. "It was the letter of one of my best loving girls which I receive this morning. She write me six, seven, eight—oh, many large pages!"

He stirred the smouldering heap of burnt ash with the toe of his boot. It rose up in a little cloud and swirled into the darkness and storm.

"It is not often that one finds a letter so useful," he remarked.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CROSSING OF THE THAL

WATCHING and waiting, the hours of the short summer night crept on. The bench was a hard couch, and Rudolf's coat but an indifferent pillow, and yet towards dawn Rose slept.

When she awoke it was to find that the morning was breaking. Through the open door a square of grey light faced her, and raising herself stiffly she stared at it with dazed eyes. How long had she slept, she wondered? She was alone; there was no sign of Rudolf anywhere.

Her head felt light and her feet unsteady as she crossed to the door and looked out. The air was very still and the rain had ceased; she could hear the rush of the water, but it no longer roared. A thick mist hung like a blanket over the bed of the stream and blotted out all landmarks. The mist and

the stillness and the ghostly light gave her an eerie feeling of unreality.

There was something inexpressibly lonely in the quiet of the grey dawn after the night of stress and fierce storm. She looked upwards and caught a glimpse of the lacerated stretch of hillside down which the landslip had torn its way. She gave a shudder. There was no unreality about that.

Where was Rudolf? she asked herself, uneasily. He could not be far away, for he would not desert her. The thought was in her mind to call out to him, when suddenly the mist parted and rolled from side to side. Shadowy forms were distinguishable rising from out the wreaths of vapour, and the great mass of rock which had been hurled into the stream stood out black and menacing.

She took a few steps down the bank and then stopped. Some one was coming rapidly up the steep ascent to meet her. It was not Rudolf. It was Mr. Egerton.

He took both her hands in his and held them for a moment.

"I am so very glad you are safe," he said, and the tone of his voice expressed more than his words.

She felt that she could have laughed aloud out of sheer gratitude and relief.

"We thought you were never coming!"

"Ah! You thought I would come?"

She flushed a little and said hastily:

"It was Baron Schölan who suggested that perhaps you might. How did you get across? and was it you who waved the light to us?"

"Yes."

"Where is Baron Schölan?" she asked, trying to distinguish objects through the mist. "He has been so good. You can't think how kind he has been."

Myles pointed to the stream below.

"He 's down there, working with the men I brought with me. He 's told me about it. What an escape you had! When I found the bridge gone I knew what had happened. Yes, it was my light you saw, but I had to go back to Waldhof for help, and then we had to wait on the other side for a bit. Those peasant fellows who came back with me said it was no use trying to cross until we had some light. We could n't tell, you see, what mischief the landslip had done."

"It seemed such a long night," she said—"and so dark."

"I wish I had found out that you were missing earlier, but—I did n't."

He was going to have said something about Benjie, and checked himself. It would only distress her to hear of the child's misery.

"But how did you get across?" she said. "You have not told me. It is so thick down there I can see nothing."

"We 've got a rope. That big rock out in the middle helped us. One of the men struggled across to it with the rope round his waist and found some wreckage of the bridge. It gave him something to keep his line steady, and the rest of the bit was easy. On the side the channel is all silted up with soil and broken timber; rather tricky, but all right if you look out for holes."

A shout from below attracted their attention and Rudolf's head and shoulders emerged from the mist. He called to them that they were to come down. Evidently the preparations for crossing were complete.

"His coat," said Rose. "It is in the hut. We will take it down to him."

"I will fetch it," said Myles, and came back with the coat thrown over his arm.

Rose touched it, and smiled.

"It was my pillow last night."

Myles said nothing. He gave her his hand to help her down the bank, and in a few minutes they were standing on the stretch of flat ground by the edge of the stream.

Rudolf welcomed Rose with a cheerful "Good-morning." He was smoking one of Myles's cigarettes, and looked as fresh as though he had just come on parade. A short distance from him a couple of stalwart peasants were working at a rope lashed round the stem of a pine tree; the rope was thick and strong and swung out in a long line across the water.

"Well," said Myles, "I think we 'd better make a start. We left a man on the other side to see that the rope did n't strain, so I don't think there 's any fear of a breakdown. You talk to these men," he said to Rudolf. "You understand their *patois*. See what they say about getting Mrs. Trevor over without a wetting.

The two men were magnificent specimens of the young Tyrolean peasant. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on their muscular, well-knit figures, and their clear blue eyes and deeply bronzed skins told of the hardy life of the mountaineer.

Rudolf threw away his cigarette, and an

animated discussion followed. One man, who had a little tuft of white feathers at the back of his hat, drew himself up to his full height and saluted the English lady with grave politeness. His companion looked at him a little enviously; it was evident that Rudolf had made a choice between the two.

Rudolf rejoined his companions.

"I find that both of these young men desire the honour of carrying Frau Trevor across the water, but I choose the one with the white feathers in his hat. He appears to me the most strong." He addressed himself to Rose. "It is necessary that you sit on his shoulder and put your arms round his neck—so." And he embraced the air.

He beckoned to the man, who came forward, smiling.

"Let me put you up," said Myles. "He 's a pretty tall mount. Hold on to the collar of his coat and give me your foot. Now," and he swung her lightly on to the man's shoulder. "Don't you feel safe?" he asked. Her expression as she looked down at him was not happy.

"No. I feel horribly unsafe, and if I hold tightly round his neck I will strangle him."

"Oh, no, you won't; he 'll take a lot of

strangling. He won't be out of his depth on this side, but he will on the other and the current 's running strong. You must hold tight."

"I wish some one would go first."

"I go," cried Rudolf promptly, and catching hold of the rope he plunged into the water. The treacherous bed of the stream was full of holes; more than once he almost disappeared from sight. When he gained the rock in the middle he waved his arm and then vanished behind it; the next they saw of him he was clambering up the bank on the opposite side.

The peasants had watched him with broad smiles of amusement. The one who was to carry Rose across nodded to his fellow and grunted out something at which Myles laughed.

"Sounds as if he thought he could go one better. Now, do you think you will venture?"

"Yes," she answered.

The young man showed her how to hold on to him, so as not to interfere with the freedom of his arms. He folded her skirt carefully round her, and then, with great deliberation, let himself down into the water.

The flooded stream, which in the blackness of the night had seemed an insurmoun-

table difficulty, lost its terrors in the light of the summer morning. Rose felt the broad-shouldered figure under her move steadily, and every inch of ground was carefully tested as he advanced step by step. The half-way rock was reached, and then she saw with what force the current was running in the channel between them and the bank they were trying to gain.

"Now 's the time to hold on tight and shut your eyes," called out Myles, reassuringly, from close behind.

But she only heard the noise of the water beating in her ears. As the man swung out into the deep channel he had nothing to keep him from being swept downwards except his hold on the rope, and for a few breathless seconds the strain was intense. It was a hand-over-hand fight against the current. Then she felt his body stiffen. He had touched ground again. She was conscious of being seized by Rudolf and lifted bodily on to the bank.

Her first impulse was to turn to the young peasant and hold out her hand; in her best German she tried to thank him.

Shaking hands was not a custom he understood. He raised the hand to his lips and

kissed it, then stood back to shake the water which was dripping from his clothes.

Myles was also shaking himself dry at a respectful distance. He made some remark to Rudolf, and then he went up to Rose.

"I 'm going to hurry you on," he said.

She hesitated.

"These men have taken so much trouble."

"I think we can leave them to young Schölan," he answered. "Come, I 'm sure you ought to get home as soon as you can."

She went back a few steps to where Rudolf was standing.

"How can I ever thank you enough for having taken such care of me?" she said. "I don't know what I should have done if you had not kept up my spirits."

"It was a great pleasure to me to guard you," said Rudolf, gallantly. "I fear you must be very tired. It is necessary that you now go away to rest. I speak to these men, and I follow quickly."

With the excitement of the adventure over, Rose's spirits flagged. She was utterly exhausted, principally from want of food, a fact which she did not realise until she had gone some little way. The path was all downhill, and twisted and turned like a corkscrew; her

head began to swim and her knees to shake under her. She was wondering how long she could keep up appearances and not show her exhaustion when she stumbled over a loose stone. Before Myles had time to put out his hand to help her she reeled back, and would have fallen had not her shoulder caught against the stem of a tree. She smiled faintly, trying to steady herself, but the look of weariness in her eyes and the dark circles under them told their own tale.

"What a fool I was not to bring some food with me!" he exclaimed remorsefully; "but I have this," and he felt in the pocket of his coat for his flask, and pouring some brandy and water into the cup he held it out to her.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Never mind, drink it."

"Not if it 's brandy. I hate it."

"Drink it," he repeated.

She drank a few mouthfuls, and the colour crept slowly back into her cheeks.

"Do you always get your own way?" she asked.

"If you collapse I shall have to carry you, and you won't find me such a steady mount as that good-looking Tyrolean."

He emptied out the few drops of brandy

that remained in the bottom of the cup and put the flask back in his pocket. He did it very slowly, so as to give her time to recover.

"You must rest a few minutes," he said.

"Rest! Oh no, let us go on. I can't rest until I get back to the Schloss. I am so afraid Benjie may have been frightened."

"Oh, I expect he 's all right. Five minutes," he said. "After that you may start."

She looked half-rebellious, then laughed a little nervously.

"How determined you are!"

The rest of the way was traversed almost in silence, and Rudolf did not overtake them.

As they emerged from the shelter of the trees they saw the old Schloss standing out grim and impressive against the pale background of the morning sky; its shutters were all closed, and the massive doorway was shut and barred.

Rose stopped short and looked at Myles.

"We won't be able to get in. I never thought of that."

He glanced up at the Clock Tower.

"Half-past four. That is not early for a Tyrolean. I expect we 'll find some one awake. I 'll go round to the back and see.

Will you wait here? I wish there was some place for you to sit down."

"Nothing but the doorstep," she answered. "But I 'm too tired to care."

"I 'm so sorry. I 'll be as quick as I can. If I can't get in any other way I 'll break a window.

He disappeared round a projecting gable, and Rose resigned herself to the doorstep.

It was a lovely summer morning. The storm had passed completely away, leaving a moist sweetness in the air. The birds were bursting their little throats in joyous praise of the coming day; from the Thal came the sound of the stream, but subdued to a quiet murmur—its anger spent and broken.

Rose listened, and fell to wondering if the experiences of the night had been a reality, or only a troubled dream. She was very sleepy. How long would it be before Myles would open the door? He had been gone only a few minutes, and yet—— She started to her feet. She heard the drawing back of a bolt behind her, and the grating of a key being turned in the lock.

Panic seized her. It seemed impossible that he could have had time to rouse the household. It was not he who was opening

the door; it was some one who had no knowledge of what had happened. She would have to explain why she came to be standing alone at half-past four in the morning on the doorstep of the hotel, with every appearance of having been out all night.

The door opened very quietly, and when she saw who stood behind it she gave a cry of joy.

"Oh! You gave me such a fright! I thought it was some one else," she said, and stumbled across the threshold.

Not much light flickered through the iron-barred windows in the old stone hall, and she could not see Myles's face distinctly, but she thought he was a very long time in fumbling with the fastening of the door.

"How did you get in?" she asked.

He dropped the bolt into its place and turned to her.

"I met the bath-woman. She was carrying the key of the Schloss in one hand, and her breakfast in the other. It seems that the *Herrschaften* begin their cure about five o'clock in the morning, so she has to be up betimes. She has some underground way of getting into the Schloss, and was making for it when I happened to catch her."

"And she trusted you with the key?"

"It was n't a case of trusting. I took it. When I was about it, I thought I might as well save her the trouble of eating her breakfast, so I brought it along with me. Rather rough fare, but the best I could do for you."

"I thought I smelt coffee."

From the window-ledge, where he had laid it down, he brought a cup and saucer. The cup was very thick, and filled to the brim with hot, strong coffee; balanced on the edge of the saucer was a slab of brown bread.

"Thank you," she said. She drank the coffee thirstily, but the bread she declined. "I cannot eat."

"You must," he said, in the same tone of voice as he had told her that she must drink the brandy.

She shook her head.

"But I don't want it."

He seated himself on the side of the table.

"I won't let you go up-stairs until you have eaten something. You have n't touched food for hours."

"You are quite the most obstinate person I have ever met," she answered.

He regarded her gravely.

"I wish you would not call me that. An

obstinate person is a pig-headed bore. I am only trying to make you do what 's good for you."

The coffee had had a reviving effect upon her, and, dividing the bread in half, she offered him one of the pieces.

"Will you share it with me?"

"That is only a way of shirking. And you are offering me the larger share. I wonder——" He paused for a moment. "I wonder, if it came to sharing anything seriously, which of us would be the more generous?"

She shook her head.

"I possess nothing worth sharing with any one."

"That depends. What one person counts worthless, another does n't."

She drew his attention to the fact that she had eaten her piece of bread.

"You ought to feel flattered, for I am very independent, obstinate—pig-headed, you would call it. May I go now?

He walked with her to the foot of the stairs.

"Is it good-night or good-morning?"

"Both I think."

She went up the first two steps and then turned.

He had not moved.

She was not impulsive, but something prompted her to go back.

She held out her hand, and he took it.

"Thank you very much for all that you have done for me," she said hurriedly. "I am not ungrateful."

And she was gone before he had time to think of an answer.

CHAPTER XV

THE CONGRATULATIONS OF THE GESELLSCHAFT

THE sun was high in the heavens before Rose wakened from the deep sleep into which she had fallen almost as soon as her head touched the pillow.

The light in the room was dim when she awoke, for the Venetian shutters were closed. She was not aware how late it was, until her eyes fell on the small travelling clock which stood on the table beside her bed, and she saw that it was past mid-day. It was a wonder she had been allowed to sleep so long. Leopoldina had had much difficulty in restraining Benjie from wakening her. Having assured himself by various skirmishings that the Englishman had kept his promise, and really had brought his mother back, he had consented to eat his breakfast and allow himself to be taken out for his morning walk.

Rose lay for some time without stirring,

her thoughts going drowsily over the events of the previous night. She was roused by hearing some one moving on the balcony, which could be entered from the corridor, as well as from her own room. Thinking it was Leopoldina, she called to her to come in.

The door opened and Ilka Rentier appeared, her figure framed against a background of flowers. The balcony seemed to be smothered in flowers. They were laid in sprays and bouquets on the balustrade, and piled on the wooden table, filling the air with their sweetness. An enormous bunch of crimson and yellow roses was propped against the side of the door.

Ilka picked up the bunch of roses, and stepping into the room cried out gaily:

"Are you already awake? But yes! Your eyes are open. See what a Garden of Paradise awaits you!"

"What does it all mean?" exclaimed Rose. She looked towards the open door and the flower-decked balcony and rubbed her eyes. "Am I dreaming?"

Ilka laughed at her perplexed face, and laid the roses on her pillow.

"It is joy, my friend. The *Gesellschaft* of this hotel, and the officers and all—every one,

send their congratulations. Last night you escaped from a great danger, and *natürlich* there is much rejoicing."

"I must have been sleeping very soundly not to hear any one on the balcony."

"But, of course, we all walk like wicked ones come to steal. See, I will bring you some of these good wishes."

She ran back and gathered up an armful of flowers at random, and then perched herself on the side of the bed with the bouquets spread out on the coverlet. Tied to the stems of most of them were cards bearing the names of the senders.

"Now we will see who loves you best. There has been much exercise of English this morning, and the dictionary has been very busy. Ah! from the wife of the Herr Hauptman. I do not admire her bouquet. On her card she has written: 'I send you my kindest relations.' " She tossed the flowers aside with a shrug of her shoulders. "It is fortunate such a tragedy is not possible."

Picking up a bunch of Alpine flowers tied with a purple ribbon, she frowned as the name on the card caught her eye.

"Frau Wolff! I do not like the familiarity of such a person. Listen to the manner in

which she addresses you: 'You will keep this in memoriams of me.' " She dropped the bouquet on the floor. "That is the place for you," she remarked drily.

Laughing and protesting, Rose caught her hand.

"You must not throw them away," she said. "I am deeply touched by every one's kindness. I never thought they would care." She bent over the bouquet which lay on her pillow. "You cannot laugh at this. And there is no card. Who could have sent it?"

Ilka raised her eyebrows.

"Such roses do not grow at Schloss Waldhof. Rudolf has but a short time since returned from riding very fast. So——" She examined the green foliage carefully. "No letter—not one single word? How strange!"

She jumped up and ran out again on to the balcony.

"From every one a greeting, but from Vilma Seybell—no!" she cried, and returned to her perch on the bed. "Vilma is a cat. It pleases me to repeat that many times. It has been told to me that last evening after supper she made a scandal about you."

Rose raised herself on her elbow.

"A scandal? How could she make a scandal about me?"

"*Pouf!* Vilma would make a scandal out of the hairs of her own head. Last night you were not at supper; Rudi also was not at supper! Vilma makes a scandal—So."

"Why does Baronin Seybell dislike me?" asked Rose.

"Jealousy! What else would it be? Vilma has one fixed *idée*. She wishes to marry, therefore she cannot bear for a man to look at another woman. At one time she tried to marry Rudi. Rudi flirted with her, of course. At first he thought it charming, for Vilma can be amusing to a man. Afterwards he became frightened. He come to me. '*Liebling*,' he said, 'what am I to do?' Then I frighten him still more. 'If you marry Vilma,' I say, 'she will wear the trewsers. She will keep you in order, and it will be very good for you to be kept in order, for you are a bad boy.' I told him a few other things, because, of course, I did not wish to have Vilma for a sister. 'She will certainly wear the trewsers,' I said. Rudi made a face—so." Ilka contorted her features diabolically. "'*Sacrament!*' he exclaimed. 'She is no longer for me. I step away.'"

Rose laughed. "But how stupid of her to be jealous," she said.

"Then again, there is the Englishman," continued Ilka. "Do you not observe how Vilma conspires to catch him? But where are his eyes? My husband say to me this morning: 'Vilma is a fool. The Englishman has but one heart, and that is for the lady of his own country.' "

Rose started up.

"Oh, please don't say that!" she exclaimed quickly. "You are quite wrong. We are not even friends. We are always disagreeing."

Ilka smiled a little enigmatical smile.

"What is your name?" she asked, changing the conversation, with her usual irrelevance. "May I call you by your name? Frau Trevor is so rigorous."

Rose broke off one of the flowers from Rudolf's bouquet and held it out to her.

"Ah so!" exclaimed Ilka. "That is *poétique*. I carry you near my heart," and she fastened the rose into the front of her dress. "I came to give congratulations, and what a lot of nonsense I talk. Now I go away to make shoppings in the village."

"And I must get up and dress."

Ilka ran back again.

"This evening we make a *fête* in the garden after supper," she explained. "It is to rejoice that you are not already dead. We make an illumination and we drink coffee under the trees, and there will be music. It is a thought of Rudi's. You will be quite well and blooming and ready to come, will you not? Now I run away."

She had only just left when Rose heard the familiar patter of little feet flying along the corridor; the door burst open, and a small figure, inarticulate from want of breath and excitement, threw itself into her arms.

"I 've runned away," gasped Benjie, hugging her rapturously.

"My darling, you 're always running away." She returned his kisses as best she could, for Rudolf's roses were included in his embrace and were crushed remorselessly against her bosom.

"The poor flowers!" she pleaded. "They are so pretty, we must not kill them."

Benjie sat up. His hat was hanging by the elastic from the back of his neck and he was flushed with victory. Childlike, he had forgotten the terrors of the night.

"Flowers! What a lot! Oh, what a lot!"

He scrambled down to the floor, and running

out on to the balcony danced with delight. He gathered the bouquets in armfuls and pelted his mother with them until she cried for mercy. Catching him by the tails of his tunic as he was rushing off for a fresh supply, she pulled him up beside her.

He subsided into sudden gravity.

"He keeped his promise, muvver," he said, after gazing at her intently for a few moments.

"Who kept his promise?" asked Rose.

"He keeped his promise," repeated Benjie. "He promised, same as you do, muvver."

"What promise? Whom are you talking about?"

"The Englishman."

With wonderful coherence for a small child who generally gabbled out his words quicker than he could think, Benjie recounted the incident of the previous evening.

Rose lay still and listened. She could see the whole scene; she could feel it: The strong man and the sobbing, frightened child. The man making promises which he did not in the least know whether he could fulfil; the child clinging to him in helpless misery, trusting with the simplicity of childhood's faith to his word.

"You like the Englishman?" she said.

"Yes," answered Benjie, promptly. "But —I like the soldier man too. I—don't know which I like best, muvver." He squeezed his hands tightly together. He always did that when very much in earnest. "I like the soldier man when he stands on his head and plays funny games. I don't sink the Englishman would stand on his head. Do you, muvver?"

"No. I don't think he would."

He squeezed his hands still tighter.

"I don't know which I like best. I sink— I sink I like them both best."

CHAPTER XVI

THE LANTERN-FÊTE AT SCHLOSS WALDHOF

THE glass doors of the restaurant opened on to the terrace, from which steps led down into the garden. A little distance from the steps stood a group of pine trees; their lower branches were lopped and their tops thick and feathery. That evening after dark had set in they presented an unusual appearance. From every branch within reach hung Chinese lanterns, which threw down coloured lights on the groups of men and women sitting round the tables below. The splashes of colour, pink and blue and green, lit up the women's dresses and shone on the uniforms of the men. All the men were smoking, and some of the women, but with the latter it was the exception rather than the rule.

It was all very simple. A dozen or so of Chinese lanterns had transformed the Schloss garden into a small *fête*. The only person

who did not regard the *fête* with approval was Vilma Seybell. She had watched the lanterns being hung up and she knew for whom the *fête* was given, and her hatred of the Englishwoman had deepened as she counted the candles being lit. Her spiteful remarks of the previous evening had made no impression on any one; they had rather added to the popularity of the two people she had tried to malign. She joined the *fête* and pretended to be enjoying herself, but she was not enjoying herself. She hated the whole thing. Her only satisfaction was, that Mrs. Trevor was sitting on one side of the circle and Mr. Egerton on the other.

The day had been one of mixed pleasure for Rose. At every turn she had been met by a flood of congratulations and plied with questions about the previous night's adventures. She was the heroine of the moment. It was a distinction she would willingly have avoided, for she did not care for notoriety. That evening when she came out of the supper room and saw the illuminations and the festive appearance of the garden, she would not allow Rudolf to lead her to one of the most conspicuous tables in the centre of the circle.

"I would rather not sit there," she said,

and made her way to a seat on the outskirts of the crowd. "It is quieter here, and I can listen to the music better."

No entertainment of such a kind could be a success without music, and the piano had been wheeled out on to the terrace. Every one was prepared to do something, joining in a chorus if they could attempt nothing better. Some one began to play the accompaniment to "Küssen ist keine Sünd," and every voice took up the air. It seemed as familiar as the National Anthem.

"Küssen ist keine Sünd
Mit einem schönen Kind,
Lacht dir ein rosen Mund
Küss ihn zu jeder Stund.
Pflücke die Rosen kühn
Die dir am Wege blühen,
Nimm dir was dir bestimmt
Weil's sonst ein anderer nimmt."

The last bars of the chorus were repeated again and again, and allowed to die reluctantly. There was a pause of a few minutes, and then a name passed from mouth to mouth.

"Baron Schölan, do you not hear them calling for you?" said Rose.

Rudolf drew his chair farther back into the shadow of hers.

"I hear, but I make believe not to hear. I do not wish to go away. I hide myself," and he went on humming "Küssen ist keine Sünd."

She did not wish it to appear that he was hiding behind her chair. Not that she took Rudolf's attentions seriously, because it would be ridiculous to do so. Any one who proclaimed his admiration from the housetops as he did could not be serious; but it was contrary to the rules of the present society for a couple to sit apart. The proper thing to do was to sit in a circle round a table and join in the general conversation.

"Pflücke die Rosen kühn," sang Rudolf, softly. "I sing your name. I find it beautiful."

"How do you know my name?" she asked.

"A little bird tell me." He leant forward. "And you wear my roses. That is kind of you."

"You really did send that lovely bouquet? There was no name. Thank you so much; they are so sweet." And she touched the flowers fastened to the front of her dress.

"*Glückliche Rosen*," murmured Rudolf.

She did not see the expression in his eyes,

and she was growing so accustomed to his pretty turns of speech.

Rudolf's name again passed from mouth to mouth. They were clamouring for him.

"What is it that they want you to do?" she asked.

He raised his hand to his shoulder and imitated playing the violin.

"I would like to hear you play."

"You wish me to go away?" he said reproachfully.

She did not reply, and he rose. Standing irresolute he looked down at her with a curious intentness.

"I will play—yes. One moment you will wish to dance, and one moment you will wish to weep—so!"

She wondered what he meant to do, for he was a person of surprises. She watched him thread his way in and out between the tables: she saw him mount the steps of the terrace and enter the Lese Saal, coming out a few minutes later with his violin case under his arm. He made a sign to Ilka, who left the friends she was sitting with and sat down to the piano. He tuned his violin carefully, and tucked a silk handkerchief into the neck

of his tunic; then he raised his bow and drew it sharply across the strings.

Every head turned, and every eye was concentrated on the slight figure in the dark blue uniform.

Rudolf's playing had an intoxicating effect upon the senses. He was no ordinary amateur. He could have held an audience vastly more critical than that assembled under the pine trees in the garden of Schloss Waldhof. His mother had been a Hungarian, and he was playing the music of that country. It was as much as some of these men and women could do to listen and to sit still. He set pulses throbbing and feet tingling.

Myles looked across to where Rose was sitting. How would the music affect her, he wondered? She was leaning forward, and the glow from a crimson lantern fell on the delicate outline of her face. Her lips were slightly parted, and her eyes were shining. She was charmed, fascinated, absorbed.

Rudolf's music grew wilder, more weird, more fantastic. When he had strung the feelings of his audience up to the highest pitch of intensity, he broke off suddenly and stood with his bow suspended in the air, and a smile hovering on his lips. Without moving, he

murmured a few words to Ilka, and she nodded in response. There was a barely perceptible pause, and then there floated out on the still air of the summer night the first few bars of a low, sweet melody. It fell with plaintive sadness on nerves still throbbing with the passionate abandonment of the wild dance which had gone before. And the player's whole expression had altered. The fire and energy and reckless gaiety had vanished. On the young face hovered a shadow. The blue eyes gazed straight out over the heads of the listening crowd: Rudolf was playing for one ear alone.

Myles looked again across to the table under the crimson lantern. How would she take this new mood?

The chair beside the table was empty. She was gone, and he was conscious of a sensation of blankness.

CHAPTER XVII

VILMA'S FACE OUT OF THE DARKNESS

STUMBLING down the dark path which led away from the lights and the gay crowd under the pine trees, Rose groped her way blindly—anywhere, anything to escape out of reach of the sound of those haunting notes.

She had no settled purpose in flying from the music; the primitive instinct of flight prompted and guided her. She ran on until she found herself standing in front of the little whitewashed chapel which stood by the boundary wall of the Schloss garden. A light from the half-open door shone out across the stone-flagged vestibule.

The place was familiar to her and she entered. It was very small, and plain to austerity. Over the altar hung a dimly-burning lamp; its feeble flame hardly sufficed to illumine the bare walls and the stiff lines of praying forms ranged down either side. She

sank on her knees and laid her forehead against the woodwork in front of her. It was shiny and black from age, and cool to the touch.

Why had she run away? she asked herself, drearily. It had been a childish impulse, useless and futile. The last time that same haunting music of Rudolf's had stirred into bitter pain the memories of the past, she had wept. Her eyes were dry now, and she had no inclination to weep. What was the use of tears? It was an hysterical delusion to say that they brought relief. They would scald her eyelids, and leave her with aching head and throbbing nerves.

All day long she had been fighting down an ever-growing weight of depression. The old feeling of rebellion struggled with a new fear; she was dissatisfied, doubtful of herself. The feeling had been with her ever since Myles had made known to her his identity, and its meaning had grown and grown. A few words and the barrier which for the last three years she had held between herself and the world was broken down. It gave her an odd sense of defencelessness. The old ground had been cut away from under her feet, and she was not sure of the new. Yesterday the working out of her future had lain in her own hands, now

a strange, undreamt-of possibility had been presented to her. She wanted time to think, to face certain facts from an altered standpoint.

For these past three years she had been nursing a bitter resentment against people whom she had thought had insulted her womanhood, and treated her as a social outcast. It had all been a mistake. Whilst she had been smarting under a sense of wrong her very existence had been unknown. Yesterday the hand of kinship had been held out to her with a generous admittance of the injustice done.

She felt hot and angry with herself when she remembered how ungracious she had been; how peremptorily she had silenced Myles when he had told her that he wished to repair the wrong of the past. Then she tried to excuse herself. She had been taken by surprise; the revelation of the truth had been so unexpected, and the old sting had still power to hurt. How could she accept from this stranger, as a favour, what ought to have been her boy's by right?

Again she went over the scene of the day before. Her mind had been full at the time of her wrongs: absorbed in her own feelings,

she had not given much thought to the feelings of the man beside her. It must have cost him some effort to speak, and he had shirked nothing. He had behaved very well. Only now, in looking back, she realised how well. He had understood; he had tacitly acknowledged her right to resent the past.

She moved her position, trying to find a cooler spot on the slippery board against which to lay her head. It ached intolerably. The more she tried to think, the less light seemed to come to her. Her mind worked in a circle round one point. Had she the right to reject Myles's claim on Benjie's future?

"If I died to-morrow, he would step into my shoes." That was what he had said. He had some right on his side, but she had refused to even discuss the possibility of such a thing.

Was her pride an honest pride or a false pride—and—if she had not come under the influence of this man's personality, would she be feeling differently? How did his personality affect her?

She raised her head, and her tired eyes fell on the dim outline of the Cross hanging over the altar. Rough-hewn out of the solid wood, it hung poised from an iron bar, its

outstretched arms seeming to throw their protecting shadow over her kneeling figure. Her lips shaped themselves into a form of prayer, but the words sounded meaningless. There are times when the spirit passes through a phase of blankness; nothing can touch it. No familiar formula strikes a spark of vitality. The soul is weighed down with a sense of spiritual numbness.

She dropped her head again on her hands, and knelt for some time without moving, then she rose and left the chapel. The door was still open and she made no noise. The faint light from the lamp shone out into the dark vestibule beyond. The man of whom her thoughts had been full was standing on the stone flags within a few feet of her.

She drew back. Perhaps he would pass on and not recognise her. The vestibule had an opening at both ends and was used as a public thoroughfare.

But he did not move, and a sudden resolution came to her. There was something that she wished to say to him, and she stepped out from the shadow of the doorway.

His start of surprise showed that he had been unaware of her presence. He did not easily show change of colour, but a dark glow

crept up under the brown skin, and then left it again unusually pale.

"I—beg your pardon," he stammered. "I —did not know you were in the chapel."

If she had not been so occupied with her own thoughts, she might have wondered why he seemed embarrassed.

It was a little difficult to speak. They had not met since that parting in the early morning, for he had not been seen in the vicinity of Waldhof all day. He had appeared in the Speise Saal very late for supper, and afterwards, when they had all gone out into the garden, he had seated himself at a table quite away from hers. She had been surprised, the least little bit disappointed. It would have been only natural for him to have come up and spoken; but she was not going to allow these things to influence her.

"I wanted to see you—to thank you for something," she began. "About my little boy —last night when he was so frightened. You never told me. Why did n't you? I never knew that it was from him that you found out we were lost."

Myles was dumb. To find that he could not trust his own voice was a novel sensation. All the evening Rudolf had followed her like

a shadow, and he had purposely held aloof. Now, quite unexpectedly, without any planning on his part, his hour had come. She was there beside him, alone in the flower-scented darkness of the summer night.

The unexpectedness of it, the overwhelming fact that he loved her, swept over him like a sudden storm blast. He did not recognise himself. He had never believed himself capable of loving a woman like this.

And she was quite unconscious of his feelings. He knew that by the way she looked at him. She knew nothing of the tumult of passion she had brought to life, and he dared not speak. He was afraid to risk his chance.

The light from the chapel door fell on her and left him in shadow. She did not understand his silence, and she felt chilled, thrown back on herself. He was disappointing. Yesterday he had been kind and sympathetic, and she had not appreciated it. To-night she wanted sympathy, and he was cold and indifferent. It was all very contradictory.

She moved ever so slightly, and the scent of the roses she wore was wafted towards him. Their fragrance seemed part of herself. Her nearness set his blood on fire.

"If I let myself go now, I 'll frighten her. She does n't understand."

He murmured something which she thought sounded a deprecation of her thanks.

"You think it was not much to comfort a little frightened child? I think it was a great deal." Her voice faltered for a moment. "He —is everything to me."

He winced at her words. He was jealous; he could not help it. That soft look of motherhood in her eyes? He would never be first. Was there a chance for him even to hold a second place? Would he be satisfied with that? Some women were as faithful to a dead love as to a living.

"Good-night," said Rose, and she held out her hand. His indifference hurt her, but she was determined not to notice it. Men hated a fuss, and being thanked for things; she ought to have remembered that. He took her hand, but released it almost at once. He might just as well have been shaking hands with a piece of wood, she thought. If he had responded ever so little it would have made a difference. She had no heart to return to the *fête*, and there was only the solitariness of her own room to fall back on. She felt the desolateness of it: the old miserable ache of loneliness.

"Good-night," she said again; "I am not going back to the others. I—I can't. Something in the music made me feel so—lonely."

Doubts, fears, scruples—Myles threw them to the winds. For one brief moment he had been given a glimpse of her inner self. Young and very human, in need of love and sympathy, in need of the happiness which was her right. He could give it all if she would only take it.

She was going. She had already made a step away from him. He stretched out his arms and they fell back again to his side. Framed in the gloom of the archway opposite he saw the face of Vilma Seybell. It was white as chalk. It might have been the face of a corpse, but for the scarlet lips and the brilliant light which flashed from the dark eyes.

He stared at the face incredulously. When he moved it vanished. He could not believe the evidence of his senses. The thing had never been there. Surprise for the moment put every thought out of his head, then surprise changed to anger, for Rose had gone.

He went quickly down the steps into the garden and listened. There was not a sound to guide him as to what direction she had taken, and it was dark. A labyrinth of paths

led back in the direction of the Schloss. What was the use of following? The spell had been broken; it was too late.

He sat down on the lowest step and cursed himself audibly for a faint-hearted fool. He had been given his chance and he had let it go. If only she had said those few last words sooner, he could have spoken. So much hung in the balance and the stake was so high. It meant everything to him, and he had been afraid. He dug his heel into the ground in front of him. Why had he let his chance go? It was a relief to hit something, and he crunched into the gravel path again.

If only she had said those few words sooner he could have spoken.

. . . . . .

Standing before the lighted candles on the dressing-table in her own room, Vilma Seybell slowly unbuttoned the long black cloak which covered her dress from neck to foot. It was made of some soft, limp material and clung to her figure. She gave her shoulders an impatient shake, and it slid to the floor. There was a suggestion of evil about it as it lay, a heap of dark, sinuous coils on the white boards.

She looked down at it and kicked it under the dressing-table. The action was character-

istic of her; its work was done. Vilma never wasted time over things after they had served her purpose.

She took a step nearer the lighted candles and stared intently at her own reflection in the mirror which hung on the wall above them. On either cheek now was a patch of colour as red as her lips. The hood of her cloak had pressed the thick, black hair down on her forehead, and from under the dark brows her eyes shone with a cruel, angry light. She felt wicked, and she looked wicked.

"I would like to kill him!" she hissed through her teeth.

It was against the man that she raged fiercely.

"What does he love her for? She—a piece of ice! To stand beside him and not to know that he was burning his heart to possess her! And for a woman such as that, a man will sell his soul!"

She tore the little muslin handkerchief which she held in her twitching fingers deliberately in two.

"These Englishmen when they love, it holds them like the Devil! He will not give her up. Because she is cold, he will not fly to the arms of another woman. He will shut her up in his

heart and worship her till eternity! He will never forget."

She flung the pieces of torn handkerchief on the floor, and stamped on them.

"He shall not have her! I would rather kill him than let him have her!"

She began to walk up and down the room, treading softly. There was something cat-like in her movements. Every time she passed the mirror on the wall she looked at herself, and the expression on her face hardened. Finally, she came to a standstill again beside the dressing-table, and picked up an open letter which lay there. She had read it before, but she read it again.

It was from her father. It was short and curt. An autocratic order to his wife and daughter to return to Vienna within three days. There was no explanation as to why they were to return. Baron Seybell was a man who gave commands—not reasons. It had suited his plans to allow his wife to go to Waldhof to take the Kur; it suited him now to order her to leave it.

Vilma threw the letter down with an exclamation of anger.

To return to Vienna now in the heat of summer when every one else was leaving it?

The idea was unbearable. What object had her father in making them do such a thing? A selfish whim, but it would have to be obeyed. He was the personification of selfishness.

Vilma continued her cat-like walk up and down the room.

Three days? What could she do in three days? She pushed the heavy hair back from her brow; its weight oppressed her.

"My head is so stupid," she muttered. "It will not tell me what to do."

She pressed her fingers hard against her hot eyeballs. The sense of physical pain seemed to bring with it inspiration. She dropped her hands and smiled; there was an animal-like cruelty in the eyes which flashed back at her from the glass on the wall.

"It is she—she who must hurt him!" She spoke the words aloud, triumphantly. "I will find a way to make him so detestable in her eyes that she will scorn him until he breaks his heart for her. It is only she who can make him suffer. Through her I will be revenged. *Gott!* But the Devil himself will be sorry for him!"

CHAPTER XVIII

MYLES EXACTS A PROMISE

THE next day passed very uneventfully. To Rose it seemed long and monotonous. Ilka Rentier had been absent on business of her own, and the soldiers were engaged on special duty, which had taken them some distance from the camp. Not a single blue coat had been seen in the Schloss garden from early morning until evening. Indirectly Rose had heard that Mr. Egerton had started at dawn on a mountaineering expedition.

"Society does not agree with me," she said to herself, as she leant back in the garden chair under the chestnut tree, and watched the low sunbeams shining on the leaves above her head. "And in a little while all these people will be gone, and I will never see them again."

An incident had occurred before she had left her room that morning which had sur-

prised and touched her. A note had been brought to her from Ilka Rentier. In affectionate, but somewhat incoherent terms, for Ilka had written in a violent hurry, she had invited Rose to go on an expedition with her the following day to Cortina.

"It is quite altogether wicked that you do not know the country of the Dolomiten. I insist, I command, I take you. After the tragedy of the avalanche it is necessary for you to have some amusement. For one night only we stay away, therefore you need not fear for the little one."

So ran the invitation, and there was a postscript.

"I will be absent from Waldhof all day. You will tell me in the evening that you will come."

It was very kind of Ilka, but of course she could not go. She could not leave Benjie, in the first place, and an expedition to stay the night anywhere was something so unusual that there seemed every reason against it. She put the idea away from her as impossible. She had lived in a narrow groove for so long that quite simple things assumed the shape of impossibilities.

Through a gap in the trees she could see

the line of the hills. The snow still lay in clefts on some of the higher reaches; two white-tipped peaks rose above the dense blackness of the pine woods.

Mountaineering must be a fascinating amusement. For quite a long time she imagined that she had been thinking about mountaineering in the abstract; then she sat up and turned over the pages of a book which lay open on her lap. She had been thinking of Myles Egerton, and where he had been, and which of those rugged peaks he had climbed. It was annoying, but ever so many times that day she had found herself thinking about him.

She read a couple of pages and frowned over the sense of what she read. It seemed rather meaningless, and she laid the book down again with a little impatient slap.

Moody people were most uncomfortable. One day they were pleasant and the next unapproachable. "He showed quite plainly last night that he was not interested," she murmured aloud. "I suppose it 's natural. He has done what he thought he ought to do, and there 's an end of it. I wish he would go away. My conscience will keep on worrying until he does."

Benjie's laugh roused her. He had been playing at a little distance from her chair with his butterfly net, and was flying backwards and forwards over the grass brandishing it in the air. The butterflies had all gone to bed, but that did not matter. Rose saw with inward misgivings that the lady of the blue parasol episode was sitting near, reading, too engrossed in her book to realise her danger. Every time Benjie passed her chair he made a swoop in the direction of her hat, which was covered with flowers and feathers, and had long gauzy streamers, and perhaps reminded him of a large butterfly.

She called to him, and he waved his net and made a dash past the gauzy streamers. The little feet tripped in their hurry, and there was a shrill scream of anger. A confusion of feathers and flowers and ribbons, and little kicking heels, and a broken butterfly net, all lay on the grass in a heap together.

"Oh!" gasped Rose. She was prepared to go to the rescue, then hesitated and sank back into her chair.

How, or from where she did not rightly know, but Mr. Egerton had suddenly appeared on the scene. He was standing in front of the enraged lady and politely taking off his

hat to her. The stream of angry language which had commenced to rain on the head of the delinquent ceased, as the gauze-trimmed hat was picked up and courteously restored, with a smile as ingratiating as any that Rudolf could have summoned for the occasion. A murmur of amicable platitudes expressed in excellent German reached Rose's ears, and then she saw Myles coming towards her holding Benjie's hand and looking down into the small face upturned to his.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Trevor," he said. He stood for a moment, not undecidedly, but just long enough to show that the humour of the situation was not lost upon him. Then he sat down on the grass in front of her chair. "Do you think I did that well?" he asked.

He slipped the strap of his field-glasses from his shoulder, and allowed them to slide to the ground. Benjie crept near, and stretching out an eager hand took possession of them.

Rose had flushed up at his approach. The remembrance of his last night's manner rankled and this pleasant self-possession was rather disconcerting. She would meet him with equal self-possession, she determined.

"Yes, you did it very well," she answered lightly. "You ought to be a diplomatist."

"Thank you. It flatters me to think that you have found me out."

He took off his hat and did not put it on again, but laid it on the ground almost touching her dress. He passed his hand over his hair. It was quite neat and unruffled, although he had been on the tramp since early morning. With the feminine quickness for observing small details she was conscious of everything he wore and how he wore it.

"He would never look hot or untidy or uncomfortable," was the thought which passed through her mind.

"Found you out?" she asked. "What have I found out?"

"My trade. I 'm in the Diplomatic Service." He picked a blade of grass from a clump beside him and began to peel it neatly into strips. "It 's good discipline. Teaches you how to smooth down irate ladies, and how to retrieve—hats, and—at times how to dissimulate."

"So I should imagine."

He glanced up.

"I deserve that, of course. You mean that first time when I was introduced to you up on the tennis court? I was full of guile that day."

"I should think that guile was very useful to a diplomatist."

"Sometimes. But don't you think it would have been rather awkward if I had given myself away then?"

She was looking down at the ground in front of her.

"Was it—was it really true that you came abroad on purpose to find us?" she said.

"Yes. There was no guile about that. I had some difficulty in getting leave. I 'm living at the end of a string now, and may be recalled at any moment."

She still kept her eyes on the ground.

"But the duty which brought you is finished. It——" She did not proceed further.

He allowed the strips of grass to fall through his fingers one by one.

"There are other things. I don't know what I shall do when I am recalled. I may refuse to go back—chuck my billet. It depends."

She changed the subject abruptly.

"Benjie is playing with your glasses. I hope he won't spoil them."

Myles drew the child towards him, and placing him between his knees on the grass.

held the glasses before his eyes and explained to him how to use them.

Rose looked on and watched silently. The two heads, the dark one and the fair, curly one, almost touched each other. Benjie did exactly what he was told, for the hidden mystery contained within those two black funnels fascinated him. Naturally, he could see nothing at first, then he whispered softly, afraid that speech might dispel the vision:

"I sink I see somethin'. I sink——" He drew a long breath. "I sink it 's a cow."

Myles laughed.

"I 'm afraid it 's not. I think it 's your nurse coming to take you off to bed."

Benjie looked over the top of the glasses and waved indignantly at the sturdy figure which was seen approaching.

"Go away!" he cried. "I 'm not comin'. I 'm not goin' to bed to-night."

"But you must go," said his mother. "Leopoldina is late. She ought to have come for you some time ago."

"No, no, I can't go. I 'm so busy, muvver. I was just beginnin' to see. I can't go to bed."

He hugged the glasses in his arms; the thought of relinquishing them was unbearable.

Myles held out his hand and said quietly:

"Give them to me, Benjie."

The child's face crimsoned, and for a moment he hesitated; then his grasp relaxed. With a lingering regret and a deep sigh he obeyed.

The marks of hot little fingers were very apparent on the glasses, and Myles took out his handkerchief and polished them.

"Now they go to bed like you," he said to a pair of round eyes which watched his every movement. He put the glasses into their case and fastened the strap. Then he set Benjie on his feet.

"Good-night," he said. "To-morrow, if mother says you may, I 'll take you out and let you look through them again. Perhaps you 'll see real cows walking about on the tops of the mountains."

Somewhat to his embarrassment Benjie threw his arms round his neck.

"Promise same as you did before," he exclaimed.

Myles was conscious of an odd sensation round his heart as the child pressed his soft lips against his cheek.

"You 've got a good memory. There, I promise," he said, and disengaged himself from the embrace.

Without further persuasion Benjie allowed himself to be carried off. There was silence for a few moments, broken first by Myles.

"Rum little beggars children are," he said.

She was watching the small figure trotting along beside Leopoldina's voluminous petticoats.

"I think my second piece of diplomacy was as successful as my first," he added. "I have been hoping that you would congratulate me."

He wished she would turn and look at him, and she did. A smile hovered round her lips; her eyes were shining softly.

"It was bribery, pure and simple, and you do not know what you have committed yourself to. He is a most tenacious little person. He will follow you about to-morrow like a shadow, and exact the fulfilment of that promise time after time."

"I am prepared to keep it. I meant what I said." He took his cigarette case out of his pocket. "You don't object?" he asked. He lit the cigarette slowly. "My first to-day! I have led the abstemious life of a wandering hermit since early morning. No smoking, a few hard biscuits, and a drink of cold water."

"You look quite fresh."

"Much fresher than when I started. If you 're bothered about anything, Nature is the best tonic you can go to." His voice took a meditative tone. "There 's something wonderfully restful about mountains. I suppose it 's the height and the solitude and the limitless space. Things get levelled down to their proper sense of proportion."

He smoked for a few minutes in silence and then began to talk in quite a different vein: talked of the topics of the day; of things social and political, of things that were going on at home—in England. He knew his world, and he had lived in the throb and stir of life. His profession had trained him to look below the surface. He could talk very well when he liked, and he had an object in talking. He wished not merely to interest; he wished to stir the heart of his listener. She was to be made to want to come back to the world she had renounced. It was all part of a plan which he had worked out during his solitary day amongst the mountains.

As Rose listened to him it was borne in upon her how complete had been her isolation of the last three years, how entirely she had cut herself off from her own people. At the casual mention of a name, or allusion to some

well-known subject of the day, a wave of home-sickness swept over her.

During a pause he thought he heard her sigh.

"Am I boring you?" he asked.

"No. But you make me feel as though I had been living on a desert island. My life has been very narrow lately. I suppose one is bound to get into a groove when everything centres round one's own individual interests."

Myles felt that his tactics were prospering.

"I think most of us cling to our grooves more or less. It is an insinuating form of self-indulgence which I combat unsuccessfully. At heart I 'm incurably lazy—I mean about so-called pleasures. Invitations, for instance. A churlish indolence tempts me to refuse them, then my unsociability reacts on my own head, and I repent."

She was reminded of the invitation she had received that morning from Ilka. To her surprise she found herself telling him about it. When she came to enumerate the difficulties in the way of accepting it, they sounded rather feeble.

Myles smoked and listened. In this new development he saw a helping hand. She wanted a woman friend; some one with a

wholesome appreciation of the happy side of life.

He knocked the ash off his cigarette and remarked quietly:

"Can't you manage it somehow? Cortina 's a place you ought to see."

"Yes; I suppose it is."

"And the Gräfin would be a charming companion. She knows that part of the world, I believe. It makes all the difference going a trip with some one who 's up to the ways of the country." He felt in his pocket and brought out a local time-table. "It 's an easy journey, too, from here. You would have to start early and pick up the train for Toblach at one of the stations on the Pusterthal." He turned over the leaves of the time-table. "I wonder which is the nearest? But a drive in the early morning just now is delightful. It 's all plain sailing after you get to Toblach. That 's the beginning of the Dolomite country on this side, and you drive all the way to Cortina. Splendid scenery."

"It sounds charming." She was a little piqued at the interest he was taking in planning out an expedition in which he was going to take no part himself.

"As to the boy," he continued, "I should

think you could safely leave him with his nurse for one night. Would it be any use if I promised to keep an eye on him? I really mean it," seeing she was about to protest. "You saw just now what a tranquillising effect I had on him."

"It is very good of you to suggest such a thing, but I am afraid it 's impossible. I don't see how I could manage to get away."

She meant to give him the impression that her decision was final, and she glanced at the little watch bangle on her wrist.

"Do you know it is long past the supper hour?" she said, and rose as she spoke.

He walked with her to the door of the Schloss. She thought he would leave her there, but he followed her into the dimly-lit hall which was quiet and deserted, for at that hour every one was in the restaurant. She paused by the iron-barred window at the foot of the stairs, on the same spot where they had parted the morning before. The light fell on his face, and she noticed that he was standing in the same attitude, one foot resting on the step, and his hand on the rail of the stairway.

"On second thoughts," she said "I don't think I will go over to the restaurant. Leopoldina can bring me something here."

A look of alarm crossed his face.

"Do you mean you won't come down again to-night?"

"No; I think not."

He was looking at her very intently.

"There—was something more about Cortina that I wanted to speak to you about," he said.

"But I am not going to Cortina; I explained why. I thought you understood."

She wished he would not look at her so intently.

He altered his position and slid his hand a little higher up the rail. A faint warning—something undefined, startled her. She took a step upwards.

"Good-night," she said hurriedly.

"Not yet," and he moved a step higher also.

She could not stand that look any longer, and her eyes fell.

His voice sounded rather strained—not as even as usual.

"I want you to go to Cortina. I have a reason for wanting you to go."

"A reason?" she faltered.

"Do you think if I had not had a reason I would have talked like that in the garden

just now?—planned out two whole days when I would not see you?"

"I don't understand," she murmured.

"No—because you—you don't understand how it is with me. Last night I tried to speak—to make you understand; but I was afraid. Did you notice anything? Perhaps; but you did not guess the truth. All day I have been fighting it out with myself how I was to make you understand."

A few seconds silence. She could have counted them by heart-beats, for her heart beat to suffocation. Then his voice went on, steadily this time. There was no tremor in its deep tone.

"I want you to go to Cortina—to go away from all influences which might sway you one way or another, and tell me when you come back if—if you will marry me? Don't try to answer me now. I won't take your answer now. It 's enough to know that you know. I had to tell you; I could not keep it to myself any longer, but I want you to have time to think—away from everything, from—the boy. Won't you trust him with me?"

She raised her head quickly.

He understood.

"I am not trying to repair the wrong of the

past. It 's you—— It 's—that I care for you alone."

She saw the muscles about his mouth quiver. He put out his hand and then drew it back again.

"Good-night," he said abruptly, and he was gone.

She walked upstairs feeling as if she were in a dream. She went out on to the balcony and sank down on a chair. The distant hills, the pine woods bathed in the evening light, familiar objects in the quiet garden below—they all seemed dreamlike, shadowed by a new significance.

"Ought I to have known?" she said to herself again and again. "Have I been utterly blind and stupid? Last night, when I thought he was indifferent and did not want my thanks—it was that."

Could it be true?

She shut her eyes and tried to recall his face, his expression, his voice—everything about him as he had stood beside her on the stair. Then she thought of him sitting at her feet in the garden. The smallest details came back to her. She could see his fingers turning over the leaves of the time-table.

"And he was thinking that all the time?

Thinking of me? How to make me understand? I 'm not really strong and independent, and I 've lived such a cramped life for so long. Things have all been too near. I could n't see properly. I could n't see the big things because the little things seemed so much bigger."

The dusk had begun to fall; but she sat on motionless, thinking, doubting. Would she go to Cortina or not?

The darkness closed in, and Leopoldina came out on to the balcony and discovered that her mistress had not had any supper. Such a thing was not to be permitted. She begged to be allowed to go over to the restaurant and procure the best she could get. All the hot dishes would be cleared away, but coffee and rolls—and cold sausage? Such things were procurable at any hour.

Cold sausage! To be confronted with cold sausage when all one's future hung in the balance! And Leopoldina was so suggestive of the merits of it and other material things. Rose looked at her abstractedly for a moment, and then smiled. She could almost have laughed. It was so prosaic.

"You may bring me some coffee. I think that will be enough," she said.

As Leopoldina was going she called her back and told her to wait. She went into the room, and lighting a candle opened her writing-case and wrote a short note to Ilka Rentier. She folded and sealed it up quickly, and gave it to Leopoldina, who hurried away.

The note contained only a few lines:

"It is very good of you to ask me to go with you to Cortina to-morrow. I accept with pleasure. What time do we start?—ROSE."

"I wonder if I have done right?" she said to herself as she stood looking down at the sheet of blotting-paper, where the impression of the writing showed dark and clear.

She closed the case, and went softly across the room into the nursery beyond.

Benjie was asleep. Curly Kate's halo of dusky locks made a dark blot on the white pillow. She stooped and kissed the curls above his forehead. He was very hot and had thrown off the bedclothes, and the tapes of the pink pyjamas had loosened in all directions. The little brown hands, thrown out on either side, were tightly clenched, as though he held on to something in his dreams. He babbled unintelligibly as the kiss fell on his

hair, and opened his eyes wide for a moment. Then he turned over on his side, still babbling, his busy brain carrying with it into dreamland the vitality of its waking hours.

"To go away from you? The hardest thing he could have asked of me," she murmured as she drew the sheet up over the little sleeping form.

CHAPTER XIX

THE AUSFLUG TO CORTINA

THE hands of the station clock were pointing to half-past ten when Rose and Ilka Rentier stepped from the train on to the platform at Toblach the following morning. They were unencumbered with luggage, save for two small handbags which they carried themselves: the expedition was to be conducted on lines of Bohemian simplicity.

Ilka was exactly the right kind of companion for Rose in her present frame of mind. She had given her no time to think of what she was leaving behind, or what would await her on her return. She was enjoying the present moment herself with the zest of a happy child, and she intended Rose to enjoy it also. She knew every bit of the country through which they had travelled. From the moment that the train crawled out from under the frowning battlements of the great fort at Franzensfeste,

which guards the gloomy portals of the Brenner Pass, until they reached Toblach, there was not a Schloss or mountain peak in the beautiful valley of the Pusterthal of which she did not possess some quaint little piece of knowledge.

She nodded approval at the station clock as they passed under it.

"The fatiguing part of our journey is already over before it becomes too hot," she said, and led the way out through the station to the square at the back, where were drawn up against the curb of the pavement a line of vehicles of various descriptions, their drivers vociferously proclaiming that his particular one was the best and his fare the most moderate.

"Now you will perceive that I am a person of very good business. *Natürlich* one does not give them what they ask. I make a bargain."

Ilka understood the business of making a bargain very well. She passed down the line with a fixed expression on her face, which no wiles or protestations from the clamouring drivers could melt. She had almost reached the end of the line, when an exclamation of pleasure broke from her lips.

"*Ach!* I find some friends—Josef and Lisa."

A little hooded *Einspanner*, to which was yoked a large, sleek, black mare, was drawn up a few paces apart from the other carriages. The bronzed face of the Tyrolean in charge of it beamed broadly in response to her recognition.

Ilka patted the black mare's fat sides.

"Ah, Lisa! How well you look! Of more corpulence than ever; Josef is kind to you."

Lisa arched her neck and tossed the scarlet plumes which swept her forelock and dangled from under her chin-band.

"You must know," said Ilka, "that Josef and Lisa have driven me many times. They are to be trusted, and will suit us excellently."

She gave the bags to Josef, who stowed them away under the seat, and jumping into the *Einspanner* she held out both hands to Rose. There was only room for two people to sit inside. Josef mounted his driving-box, and cracking his whip, Lisa started off at a slow trot.

Ilka pushed down the hood which Josef had kept up to preserve his red velvet cushions from the sun.

"Are we not an amusing speculation? The

Einspanner is so small and Lisa is so large. Like an elephant running away with a perambulator; but she will take us to Schluderbach most easily. That is half-way, where we will lunch and rest. From there we procure a more extravagant carriage with two horses, for when we travel farther into the Dolomiten there is more steepness of the road."

The recollection of that drive never faded from Rose's memory. Not all at once does the wild grandeur of the Dolomites break on the traveller's eye. At first the broad, yellow road threads its way like a golden ribbon through pine-clad banks, here opening up vistas of grassy glades, there glimpses of flowery meadow, and the tinkle of the cowbells tell of where the peasants herd their droves. Then past the Toblacher See, that dark, secretive, little lake over whose shadowy surface a bygone mystery seems ever to brood. On, on it winds its golden way, and towering to the skyline, growing ever grander, wilder, darker, that endless range of mountain wall cut clear against the heavenly blue of the Tyrolean sky. Broken, scarred, serrated, that mountain wall seems to glide like a great moving picture on its majestic way. Strange and fantastic are the forms which march in the

mighty procession. Tumbled masses of rock perched at dizzy heights on slender pinnacles, hover like monster birds of prey over cleft and chasm. Every bend of the road brings into view some strange, wild shape, some mammoth freak of architectural grandeur, as though a giant age of centuries past had been uprooted, and flung its ruins broadcast to earth and sky.

Sometimes Ilka talked, sometimes for long intervals she was silent, her love of beauty responding to Nature's mood.

"The Monte Cristallo," she said, laying her hand on Rose's arm, and pointing to a range of bristling crags throwing their snow-capped reflections across the vivid green waters of the Dürrensee.

Rose remembered. It was the Monte Cristallo which Myles had shown her that evening in his sketch-book. She was going over the same ground as he had gone over.

She fell into a little day-dream. To-morrow she would be back at Waldhof. The hours were flying very fast, and absence and new scenes and new influences were making other things fly very fast too.

It was close upon the hour for the mid-day meal when Josef drew Lisa up before the

door of the hotel at Schluderbach. Smiles and bows and kissings of the hand greeted Ilka as she made her way into the Speise Saal.

"They all seem to know you," said Rose. "You are meeting old friends everywhere."

Ilka laughed.

"But yes. To-day they are scattered like crumbs." She explained something to the head waitress, and then passed on through the Speise Saal out on to the verandah, where they chose a table, and presently their lunch was served to them.

"I 'm so glad we came out here," said Rose. "How can people sit in a stuffy room with all this loveliness so near?"

Beyond the strip of garden stretched the meadow flats, their brilliant green broken by clumps of scrubby yew, the velvety background of the pines encircling them to where the mountains rose on every side. To the right the sun-kissed slopes of the Croda Rossa glowed with the soft pink blush which is the wonder of that marvellous land of light and colour.

"I love the Dolomiten," said Ilka. "I never forget the happy days I spent amongst its mountains with my parents when I was a child. Here at Schluderbach it is already too

civilised. But ah! I could show you such glories of the Misurina and the Platz Wiese when it is one pink carpet of Alpen Rosen. My father was a great explorer, and with him I would wander for long days of delight, and return home always with a new and delicious discovery and a happy heart. I loved the Dolomiten then with a child's awakening love for beautiful Nature, and I love it now with that sense fully awakened—I mean as fully awakened as it can be in one as imperfect as I am."

"You are not imperfect," said Rose. "And I think you are one of the most to be envied people I have ever met. You know how to be happy."

"But why not? I find the world very agreeable."

"You make it so."

"Is it not better to see the flowers than the dust heaps?" answered Ilka, smiling.

"Every one cannot do that," said Rose. "Do you know that you make me want to be happy too? Do you remember that first time you came up and spoke to me in the garden? I was feeling so friendless. Things seem to have been quite different since then. Does it make you any happier to know

that you have brought sunshine into my life?"

Ilka's blue eyes, which were so like Rudolf's, were gazing up at the glowing slopes of the Croda Rossa.

"It may be that the sunshine was but waiting to step in," she said.

Rose did not know what impelled her to answer as she did. It sounded rather irrelevant.

"Is there anything in the world so difficult as to be quite honest to oneself—to be able to show outside what one really is?"

Ilka raised her eyebrows.

"To whom do you wish to appear in such *déshabillé?*"

Rose rested her clasped hands on the tablecloth. Her voice trembled a little.

"There was one year of my life—I was not true to myself—I know now that I was not. I tried to deceive myself. That kept me up, I suppose. Living in the shadow of what I thought I ought to be." She flushed painfully. "My girlhood was too happy. It prepared me for nothing. I look back upon it with a kind of passion of regret. The one being who loved me more than all the world made it so, and when she left me I did not know how to stand alone, and——"

A wistfulness crept into her eyes. She did not try to finish her sentence.

Ilka took a spray of bluebells from the flower glass on the table and laid it lightly for a moment across the clasped hands on the white cloth.

"*Liebling*," she said, with unusual gravity. "You think too deeply. It is not wise. There comes a time when it is well to shut the door and to open the window."

"But—if there were something—some one to whom it mattered very much. Would not it be better if the door were not shut? If they could see—I mean know that——"

Ilka shook the little bells one against the other.

"For myself," she said, "I find that it is not agreeable altogether to *désillusionner* the world about oneself. Do you understand? Have we not all our shut doors? Oh, but yes, of course."

A heavy footstep was heard crossing the verandah. Some one stopped just at the back of Ilka's chair.

"*Ach*, Josef!" she exclaimed, turning quickly.

Josef held his little green Tyrolean hat in his hand and twirled it round and round

diffidently. He had come to inquire if the *hochwohlgeborene* Gräfin would permit him to drive her the remainder of the way to Cortina? He could procure a most comfortable carriage and a pair of fresh horses, and he would charge much less than would a new driver.

Ilka listened to his explanations. The suggestion pleased her, but she took care to make a bargain with him all the same.

"Such a thing is always necessary," she said, after she had dismissed him.

The interruption had caused a break, and Ilka did not try to bring the conversation back to its former vein. She did not wish to do so; she flashed off to something quite different. She pointed with her coffee cup towards the jagged peaks of the Monte Cristallo.

"I wish that we had but time to climb a mountain. Do you not also?" she exclaimed.

"I don't know that I do," said Rose, doubtfully.

"Oh, but it is glorious! Last summer I again make a visit to Cortina, and I conspire with a friend to climb a mountain. It was a great secret, because our husbands say 'No,' it was dangerous. *Pouf!* Dangerous? Not at all. We start very early in the morning, and leave them sleeping most peacefully in their

beds. It was necessary to drive a long way, and after that a most steep climb to get to the rocks, and then the fun began. We took off our skirts! Ought I to jump this bit? But never mind, for it was not improper, because we already wore kinkers. Knickers—what do you call them? Then the rope was fastened round our waists and we began. It was grand; for our guide said we would not get up, and we did, but in such a state! My friend had got a big tear in her kinkers, and I had an enormous hole in all my stockings. And when we had to do the most difficult bit we saw a photographer with his *Apparat* sitting at the bottom to watch us with the greatest interest. I could have kicked stones on to him. I had one foot on one rock, and the other on another, and no skirt! Imagine to be photographed by a professional in that position. We howled with despair, but he only shouted 'Bravo!' and ran away; and then—he put the photographs in his shop window, and when our husbands see them there was a great tragedy. But we had a grand time, and twenty-five blue spots on my legs, and all our arms were stiff the next day."

Rose leaned back in her chair and laughed until she almost cried.

Ilka took out her cigarette case and lit a cigarette.

"When you have finished your coffee," she said, "we will go for a little walk, and then Josef will be ready and we start once more for Cortina." She looked up at the cloudless sky. "Are we not fortunate? The sun is going to shine upon us all day."

But her prophecy was not fulfilled. They had proceeded only a very short way from Schluderbach when rolling banks of cloud appeared out of the blue, and before long mountain and valley were veiled in thick wreaths of floating vapour. The mist had a weird fascination of its own. Through rents in the clouds huge forms would steal out and then disappear again with the suddenness of some ghostly apparition; or a stray sunbeam piercing the white shroud would strike a brilliant shaft of rainbow light down the mountain side, scattering for an instant the mystery of the unseen, and illuminating with wild, unearthly beauty some deep, dark gorge or lofty, snow-capped peak.

As the broad yellow road penetrated deeper into the heart of the country its windings grew steeper, its curves sharper; in places cutting into the solid face of the rock and

hanging almost in mid-air over some yawning chasm. At one point in the road Josef made his passengers alight and look over the side of a bridge to see the famous Schlucht.

Ilka had seen the Schlucht many times before, but she sat on the parapet and threw stones down into it and greeted it joyfully as another old friend.

As the carriage rolled out into the valley and along the straight stretch of road which runs at the base of the great Pomagagon Range, the mist swept back and the sun blazed out. Ilka stood up and pointed eagerly to the first glimpse of Cortina, lying like a handful of scattered rose leaves in the cup-like basin of the Ampezzothal. Presently they were driving through the main street of the little town, and her head was perpetually turning from side to side, her expressive gestures marking approval or disapproval of whatever changes met her eye.

"Another new hotel—which will be a monster of hideousness!" she exclaimed, making a grimace at a building round which the scaffoldings were still standing. "But Cortina will soon become too modern altogether. We do not go to an hotel—not even to that one," and she indicated with her parasol the quaint

old façade of the Stella d'Or, standing back from the thoroughfare behind its sheltering hedge of clipped trees.

She tapped Josef on the back.

"To the Villa Apollonia," she said, and, turning to Rose, explained: "It is not an hotel. Oh no! It is a *Patisserie*, kept by a charming family of Italians, where I have lodged many times. There we sleep, for the beds are most comfortable. We go out to eat at whatever restaurant we find most amusing. On an expedition such as this I pick here and I pick there."

The Villa Apollonia received its visitors with open arms. The pretty girls in their picturesque costumes who were serving in the *café* ran out to the door, laughing and chattering as only Italians can. Ilka had a greeting for every one. The fat little mother she discovered in the kitchen in the act of turning out a huge dish of *Polenta* for her family. Ilka helped to cut up the *Polenta*, Italian fashion, with a piece of string, and the fat little mother held her sides and laughed delightedly.

Was the gracious Contessa to make a long stay in Cortina? The best rooms in the Villa Apollonia would be at her disposal, and that of the Signorina her friend.

"Signora," corrected Ilka; "and we stay but one night. Therefore we are very busy to make the time long, and we wish to have our chocolate now, at once, and then we amuse ourselves.

"But not in running about with a guide-book and staring until our eyes wish to jump out of our heads," she remarked, as a few minutes later they sat sipping their chocolate under the striped awnings. "It is the *mise en scène;* the colour and the life and the beauty of the roundabouts of such a place which I find agreeable."

Therefore they did nothing which a conscientious tourist ought to do. They did not climb to the top of the Campanile, nor did they drive out to the Belvedere, and yet the next two hours passed very quickly, for Ilka's knowledge of what she called the roundabouts of Cortina was more interesting than a dozen guide-books.

"And the end of the day brings the most beautiful thing of all," she said, "when we watch the Alpen Glow descend upon the mountains."

At the Croce Bianca they had supper: a small restaurant whose modest row of white-clothed tables were set out on the pavement

flanking the main street. Ilka chose it because of its simplicity, and because they could sit and watch the bright little world of Cortina moving before them. It was the hour when every one seemed to be abroad in the streets: the *cafés* and restaurants were busy: merry, laughing groups collecting round the tables, jostling each other in the roadway; Italian voices predominating over the more guttural German, for the atmosphere and temperament of the South are very present with you in Cortina.

The Belluno diligence rattled past with much cracking of whips and jingling of harness. A fat Italian nurse, with a big ruche of blue ribbon round her head and streamers flowing, swayed and lurched on the back seat, clasping two tired, dusty little children in her arms.

Rose wondered if that was the same diligence which Myles had travelled in. She watched it out of sight, still wondering, and looked round to find that Ilka had left the table and run out into the road, where she was talking to a group of people.

"Only think," she exclaimed, when she returned, "the friend of whom I told you—who climbed a mountain with me—is here in

Cortina, and she has broken her leg climbing another mountain! Is it not a tragedy? I have promised to go and see her this evening. You will not be angry with me?"

"Angry? Oh, no."

"I do not ask you to come with me, for broken legs are not amusing, and *natürlich* she will talk much. But we will walk together to her villa, and near it there is a charming spot where you can sit and watch the Alpen Glow. Will that be agreeable to you? I will try not to be long."

"Please don't trouble about me," said Rose. "I shall sit and wait for you."

The sun was sinking low towards the hill-tops when they left the town and climbed the ascent to where a few scattered villas dotted the grassy slope facing westwards. Ilka's friend lived in one of the highest up of the villas, but she led the way past it by a side-path and came out on a bit of open ground strewn with rocks and boulders, and where the wild flowers grew thick in the mossy turf.

"From here I saw my first sunset at Cortina," she said, stopping and laying her hand on Rose's shoulder. "I have never forgotten that time. Rudi was here also, and my parents. It was one of those glorious evenings

that seem almost too happy to be of this world. First the mountains became golden, and then pink like the heart of a rose, and then violet and purple. We sat on the grass among the flowers, that smelt like only Alpen flowers can smell, and watched the shadows grow deeper and deeper around us, as if Nature suddenly became sad after having been gloriously happy."

She was silent for a few moments, then she pointed across the valley.

"See! the Alpen Glow is already beginning to kiss the Cinque Torri. Is it not like a piece of heaven? And alas! I go away to talk of broken legs! Are you quite sure you do not feel alarmed to be left here alone?"

"No," answered Rose. "I do not feel at all alarmed."

After Ilka had disappeared round a bend in the pathway she walked on a little farther, until she came to a place where a craggy rock stood out from the sloping bank above. It was not difficult to scramble up its side, and she found the summit crowned by a thatch of heather and fern. She sank down close to the overhanging ledge, and burrowed a little nest for herself in the soft ground.

It was the first time she had been alone that day, and in a moment her thoughts were back at Waldhof. Benjie would be asleep—or ought to be. She wondered if Myles had kept his promise and taken the child out with him. She leaned back against the bank of heather and drew in a deep breath of the warm, scented air. She had been longing for this hour of solitude so as to have leisure to think, and now her thoughts frightened her. To-morrow began to loom before her, gigantic and fateful. To-morrow she would be back at Waldhof. How was she to answer that question?

She sat with her eyes fixed on the glory of the western sky. The sun had sunk to rest in its bed of crimson and gold; the Alpen Glow was flushing the hill-tops, the purple shadows creeping stealthily across the valley. Sweet, subtle scents breathed out their fragrance. Nature was so beautiful—the world so full of wonderful possibilities.

"But I must be quite sure," she murmured. "I wish something would happen to show me —myself."

Her eyes were blinded to what lay beneath by the gorgeous splendour of the flaming sky. Something roused her with a start. Something soft and fragrant fell with a little flop into

her lap. It was a bunch of wild flowers, tied together by a wisp of grass.

She bent forward and looked over the side of the rock. Rudolf Schölan was standing immediately below her. His head was thrown back and his eyes were laughing up into hers.

"Herr Baron!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "Where have you come from?"

CHAPTER XX

A PASSIONATE LOVER

RUDOLF swung himself up to the top of the crag and stood with his hand raised to the peaked brim of his hat.

"Where have you come from?" asked Rose again.

He laughed, and dropped down on the ground beside her.

"I have run away," he said.

"That means you have done something you ought not to have done."

She spoke as if she were scolding Benjie. In some ways this odd creature was quite as irresponsible.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"*Natürlich*, if I am found out—but I can run back again very quickly. As the bird flies, our camp for to-night is not at such a great distance." He flicked some dust from his long

riding-boots. "I travel through the mountains. So far by horse, and so far by leg."

"Straight to this place! How did you know where to come?"

He glanced round.

"But of course I knew that Ilka would bring you here. Where is she?"

The reason of Ilka's absence was explained.

"Is the leg very much broken?" he asked.

Rose said that she was afraid it was, and he murmured to himself: "*Gott sei dank!* Then there will be much talk." But she did not hear, and drew his attention to the sunset.

"Is n't it glorious? I hope Ilka won't miss it all."

He did not turn his head to look.

"The *Sonnenuntergang* is beautiful, and I am very fond of my sister, but it was not for such things that I come to Cortina. It was to see you. I come all these miles across the mountains to see you."

She thought it only one of his extravagances of speech to talk so, and answered lightly:

"I don't expect it is the first time you have run across the mountains to Cortina. You seem to know all about it."

Her sight was blinded by the Alpen Glow, and she did not see the expression that came over his face, but to her alarm she felt both her hands seized and covered with kisses.

"Herr Baron!" she exclaimed, wrenching them free. "Don't! I can't bear to have my hands kissed—you know that."

Rudolf's blue eyes flashed.

"You do not believe that I come to Cortina to see you? But it is true, for I love you, I love you, I love you!" he cried excitedly. "All yesterday I did not see you. Since two nights ago when we made the *fête* in the garden I have not seen you. It was unsupportable; I could not bear such absence any longer."

She sat speechless. She did not know what to say, for he was in earnest. She was horrified, aghast; what she had taken for an air-bubble was a bomb, and it had exploded at her feet.

"You must not say such things. I—I don't believe you mean them," was all she could stammer at last.

"Mean them? You think that I do not know what this love is? *Gott!* but I tell you it is burning me up in flames! It is different

to any love which has ever been in my heart before!"

"I—I am so sorry."

He threw out his arms with a tragic gesture.

"And it makes me feel that I want to be good! Such a feeling is most strange to me. I do not know what to do with it."

There was a world of appeal in his voice. Why could she not understand?

"Can you not love me? Will you not try to love me? If you tell me of some things that would make me agreeable to you I will do them. There is nothing in the world I would not do to make you love me."

"It is—impossible," she murmured.

"But I have had such hopes! You have never been cold to me. Many times you have smiled upon me when you have not smiled upon others. And—you wore my roses! The roses of your name! You would not have done such things only to break my heart?"

She felt she could have wept tears of self-reproach. It was quite true she had never been cold to him; she had never thought it necessary to be cold to him. He had suddenly sprung into the colourless monotony of her life, and she had accepted his boyish admiration

without a thought of its seriousness. She was as unprepared for this as she had been for those few quiet words of the night before. And she ought to have known. Her woman's instinct ought to have told her. Why had it not? She had been selfish, self-centred, blind. She had allowed this thing.

Rudolf was pleading with eager, impassioned gestures.

"Why do you not speak? I ask you to say: 'I love you.' It is not difficult. I have said these words many times. They are not difficult words."

At the *naïveté* of it, she found herself struggling between tears and laughter. Rudolf was not offended, but he was puzzled.

"You find that amusing?" he asked. "Why?"

Dared she remind him of that long list of loves to which he had confessed? If he could only be persuaded to treat this in the same way. She hurried on, explanatory, apologetic, and with a guilty consciousness that she was taking a mean advantage of his ingenuousness.

"You said yourself—that morning, do you remember, when we had coffee together in the garden—that—that there had been so many. I thought it was just like that. I—I

never thought you were in earnest. Really I did not. Please let us think so. Don't let us take this seriously——"

She had said the wrong thing.

"You do not understand!" he broke out vehemently. "I wish for to marry you! I did not wish for to marry any of these other loves. It is not necessary to marry all one's loves, but I love you to distraction, and I want to marry you."

She put up her hands to her ears.

"Oh, please don't talk like that! Please let us go back to being friends, the way we were before, and not talk about love at all!"

"*Gott Himmel!*" he exclaimed. "But I was never anything but a lover from the beginnings!" He scanned her face searchingly. "Why can you not love me? Ah!—some one has told you that I am a dangerous man."

No. It had never occurred to her to think of Rudolf as a dangerous man!

"I am not a monument of stone!" he cried recklessly. "Oh no, not at all!" He bent nearer. "You have heard stories about me? It is because you have been told that I am a dangerous man that you will not listen to me?"

He was getting more and more excited, and she felt her control over him slipping

away. She was a little afraid, but she must not show it.

"I have not heard any stories about you, and I would not have listened to them if I had. I want to like you, and to think what is good of you," she said gently.

"Like! *Aber nein!* You give me that word before, and I had no use for it!"

He flung himself away from her, and sat staring at the glowing sky. He did not see it. His face had lost its look of boyish carelessness. In all his gay young life he had never been thwarted in love, and he could not understand denial. Why would she not listen to him? There must be a reason.

He was very quiet. She would have done better not to have spoken.

"I am so sorry that I let you think that I meant anything but friendship," she said. 'Please forgive me. What you ask is quite impossible. One—cannot give what one has not got."

"Ah!" He turned on her with such vehemence that she drew back, startled, and with a fresh fear. The light in his eyes was a revelation. She could not have believed that he was capable of looking like that; unwittingly, she had given him the key to the

puzzle. "You cannot give what you have not got? Then there is some one else! Only such can be the reason. You are so sure. You could not be so sure if there was not some one else."

She could not find a single word to answer him with. He had told her what she had nor dared to admit to herself. "If something would only happen to show me myself?" had been the question on her lips whilst she sat dreaming in the rosy light of the Alpen Glow, and Rudolf had come, and answered the question.

How much more would he guess? He was watching her, demanding an answer. A kind of despair seized her. She could never make him understand, because she could not explain. She was quite free, no promise bound her; Myles had exacted nothing. She wished —— She caught her breath with a little gasp. She wished that he had not left her so free.

And Rudolf must be answered.

"There is some one else!" he kept repeating. His burning eyes never left her face, and their expression frightened her.

He was fast losing patience. To stand aside and see another man take his place?

That had never been his way in love. Young, strong, ardent, he was vividly alive to the power of a woman's charm, but no experience had prepared him for this! His fickle fancies had never given him a heartache; he had been accustomed to win so easily. Now, with all the fire of his emotional nature roused, repulse met his hot ardour. He did not stop to think that if she loved another man he was only beating the air by trying to win her for himself. Uppermost in his mind, surging through his veins and throbbing in every pulse and nerve, was the dominating, clamouring cry for his heart's desire.

"I will not give you up to any man! You are mine! I take you, I keep you!"

The hoarse voice did not sound like Rudolf's, and it was not the reflection of the crimson sky which made him look so strange.

Rose fought against the paralysing sensation of fear which was creeping nearer and nearer to her. He had called himself a dangerous man—perhaps he was. She did not know what wild strain might run in his blood; she glanced round fearfully. The shadows were deepening; the hillside was deserted; she was quite alone with him, and he was strung up to a pitch of excitement that a

look or a word might put him beyond her power.

Suddenly he leaned forward and again caught her hands in his and covered them with kisses. His lips seemed to burn her skin. Her instinct was to tear herself free, but he held her in so tight a grasp that she knew it was useless. The humiliation of a struggle she would not have. She bit her lips hard to stop their quivering.

"Let me go!" she said in a low voice. "You are hurting me!"

His blazing eyes flashed defiance at her.

"It is love, and love cannot hurt!"

"Let me go!" she repeated.

Still he held her, tighter than before. She was quite at his mercy. Her tongue was her only weapon, and she was so afraid that her voice would show how frightened she was. By an immense effort she kept it under control.

"You said I made you feel good. Do you call this being good? Is this the way to show love—to try and frighten me? Where is your chivalry?"

Her heart was beating fast, but she met his eyes unflinchingly. She saw the struggle. Every muscle of his face was working, and his breath came and went in quick gasps.

Then she felt his fingers tremble; their grip relaxed. With a strangled sob he tore himself away and, flinging himself down at her feet, he buried his face in the grass.

"*Ach, mein Gott!*" he cried brokenly. "What shall I do? I am altogether mad. I am nothing but a brute. You will never forgive me. You will never speak to me again. I am the most miserable man in all the world!"

The crisis was past. From the height of passion he had sunk to the depths of despair. Rose drew a long breath of relief, but she felt she could have wept herself, she was so sorry for him. It was her own fault that this had happened. It seemed altogether hard and cruel and unreasonable that he had been made to show himself in this hateful light because he loved her.

She did not dare to comfort him; and when presently he moved, and raised his head, she turned away, thinking he would not like her to be a witness to his self-abasement.

But Rudolf did not think of that. It was characteristic of him to be quite unselfconscious as to how he looked. He thought that her attitude meant that she still shrank from him; timidly he touched the hem of her dress.

"Will you not speak to me? Are you so angry with me that you will never look at me again?"

His humility made her self-reproach the more acute. The tears started to her eyes.

"I was angry—but now I am more sorry than angry."

"Sorry?" he repeated; "but that is to be sad?"

"Oh, don't you understand? I hated to feel that you had disappointed me. I want always to think of you as I have known you—chivalrous, and—truly a gentleman."

"You say such things and yet it is not possible for you to give me one small piece of love?"

"Not in the way you mean," she answered gently.

He gazed at her mournfully.

"Then there is nothing more for me to do. All is over. I must learn to—*plier la tête*," and he took off his hat.

The light fell on his uncovered head; his boyish, sun-browned face looked so young, and so tragically miserable. She longed to comfort him as she would have comforted a hurt child, but she dared not. He was of too inflammable a nature to pity lightly.

She wished Ilka would come back. She strained her eyes to follow the windings of the little path below, and thought she saw the flutter of a white dress. It disappeared behind a rock, and then appeared again. Ilka's voice called out her name, and she answered.

Rudolf raised his head. His drooping shoulders straightened, and the next moment he had sprung to his feet, his slim figure clearly outlined against the sky.

"Ros—a?"

Ilka's voice floated up to them.

Rudolf made a curious sound, soft and low, like the wakening call of a bird at dawn.

Ilka had drawn quite near.

"Rudi!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "Is it indeed Rudi that I see?"

"But yes. Did you think that it was the *Abendstern* fallen from heaven?" he cried, and sprang down the side of the rock.

Rose could hear their laughing voices below. Rudolf was giving an extraordinary explanation of how, and why, he happened to be where he was. How much of it would Ilka believe? she wondered. It was impossible to tell. A few minutes later the two scrambled up the rock together, and Ilka sat down on

the grass and held out her hand to Rudolf and demanded a cigarette.

"Or else I die at once!" she exclaimed. "I am altogether exhausted with talking of broken legs!"

If Rose had seen the contents of a hurried letter which Ilka wrote to her husband that night before she went to bed, she would have had no doubts as to Ilka's powers of observation:

"You will please me by keeping Rudi very busy for some days. Give him so much work to do that he will not find any time to think of the *beaux yeux* of a certain charming lady whose name it is needless to mention."

"Fritz will understand," she said to herself as she sealed up the letter.

It was quite natural that Rudolf should have fallen in love with Rose, but the affair must not be allowed to become too serious. Ilka had her own views for Rudolf's matrimonial future. A bride with a handsome dot was a necessity; and Rose was not in love with him, therefore no hearts would be broken. Rudolf's heart at present was certainly in danger; but Ilka had seen it survive many storms, and was not afraid.

"And she?—I must guard her. She pities him, and that might deceive her. It must not be. She is to marry the Englishman!" And Ilka stamped her letter and ran downstairs with it herself, so that it might go early in the morning.

CHAPTER XXI

FRAU WOLFF SPIES THROUGH THE BUSHES

A DUSTY travelling carriage stood in the courtyard at Schloss Waldhof. The horses had been watered at the wooden trough which stood under the cherry tree by the gateway, and the driver was refreshing himself inside the restaurant.

The Frau Baronin Seybell and Vilma were to be his passengers on his return journey to the station. They were leaving Waldhof that afternoon *en route* for Vienna. It wanted still more than an hour until the time when it was necessary to start, but the luggage was already down and heaped in a pile on the doorstep. Round it at intervals fluttered the Frau Baronin nervously. She was always in a state of nervous flutter when starting on a journey, and on this occasion was more so than usual, because Vilma had given her no help at all in the final arrangements. She

did not know where Vilma was. Vilma was much too modern and emancipated to allow her mother to control her movements, and the Frau Baronin did not dare to make inquiries. It would be like her to keep every one anxious until the last moment, and then there would be a rush and scramble to catch the train.

Supposing they missed the train? The Frau Baronin shuddered at such an idea. She was a bundle of nerves and fears. What woman would not be who had a husband with a temper as finely set as the hair-spring of a watch!—and he was waiting for her at the other end of the journey.

For the third time she made an excursion out to the gateway and looked up and down the road, but there was no sign of Vilma. There was no one in sight at all, except Frau Wolff, who was sitting on a seat a little distance from the front door, watching her through a pair of long-handled lorgnettes. She sighed. Of course it still wanted an hour to the time of starting; she must try to wait patiently.

Frau Wolff was enjoying herself. Watching the Seybells' departure was very interesting, and Waldhof had been particularly devoid

of interest for the last two days. Gräfin Rentier and the English lady were absent, and did not return until that evening. The General and his staff were also absent, and there had been no dancing or lawn tennis or *fêtes* in the garden. She might have found some compensation in watching the young Baronin Seybell and the Englishman, but there was nothing to watch. The romance she had built up concerning these two people had collapsed. The Englishman was not in love with Vilma; he was in love with his own countrywoman. What puzzled her was, why he had not gone to Cortina. If the lady he loved was not at Waldhof, why did he seem so content to stay there? It was all very strange.

For the fourth time she saw the Frau Baronin go out to the gateway and look round in search of her daughter. What a lot of boxes the Seybells had! She wondered how much had been given to the man who carried them down. Such things were very interesting, and she often sat on that particular seat to watch arrivals and departures.

Then she saw Mr. Ridley emerge from the door of the Schloss and pick his way carefully between the piles of luggage. He held

his hat in his hand, and stood looking from right to left before descending the steps. He saw Frau Wolff, who nodded to him encouragingly, and, after hesitating for a moment, he walked across to where she was sitting and sat down beside her. It was rather odd, but it always happened that, if he were in a difficulty or perplexity, fate threw him in the way of Frau Wolff. An incongruous kind of comradeship had sprung up between this oddly assorted couple. Mr. Ridley had never been abroad before, and national distinctions and the conflicting elements of class prejudice meant nothing to him. He regarded her with the leniency born of gratitude.

Frau Wolff was flattered by Charles's appreciation, but she was under no delusion as to wherein lay her attraction for him. Her preliminary remarks showed that.

"Vat is ze matter?" she asked. "I perceive zat ze face is red and ze hairs of ze head is distorbed. Vat is ze matter?"

Charles knew that he looked hot and fussed. It did not make him feel any cooler to be told so.

"The customs of this country are calculated to disturb any one who has a proper sense of the fitness of things," he answered

crossly. "There is a standard of propriety which ought to be respected in matters of daily life, which I find entirely wanting here. Twice to-day I have been made to feel most uncomfortable.

"So—so," said Frau Wolff. A good deal of what he said was beyond her, but she generally managed to catch the drift of his pedantic little grievances. "Is it ze woman of ze bass who has made you feel once more so shockeeng?"

"No, it was the laundress. I consider it —most immodest the way she hangs the clothes which she brings back from the washing on the pegs outside the bedroom doors. Presumably she has mistaken my number. Coming out of my room just now I had to push my way through a dangling curtain of garments which certainly did not belong to me. Trashy, flimsy things, trimmed with—" He coughed and passed his hand over the top of his head. "No wonder my hair is ruffled."

Frau Wolff nodded.

"But of course she hangs ze cloeses on ze doors. You like better if she brings zem to speak vis you in ze room?"

"No," snapped Charles. "Such matters ought to be arranged by the hotel officials.

I like to see things and people in their proper places. It appears to me that women in this country take an unseemly part in work that ought to be done by men." He put on his hat, and then took it off again. "This afternoon the tailor sent his wife to fit on my new suit of clothes! His wife! !" Charles's voice rose two tones higher. "The creature had not even the decency to wrap up the things in paper. I found her walking up and down the corridor with the whole suit hanging over her arm. Coat and waistcoat and trousers. Trousers! To be fitted on! Imagine such a thing!"

"Trousers?" echoed Frau Wolff. "Such a vord I do not know."

Her hand sought the hanging pocket which she wore at her waist. So much English was now talked in the hotel that it was necessary always to carry the dictionary about with her. She searched its pages rapidly.

"*Beinkleider!*" She tapped Charles's knee with the handle of her lorgnettes. "*Beinkleider.* But of course I onderstand."

"May I be allowed to see the word for myself?" asked Charles. "I wish to be able to explain matters to the tailor, and dictionary translations are often misleading." He took

the book, and held it up close to his eyeglasses. "*Beinkleider*—pantaloons, inexpressibles, leg-coverings. Thank you. I think the meaning is quite clear. I am going to see the tailor now."

"I komm vis you," said Frau Wolff with decision. "I know zis man who makes ze cloeses. He is stoopid as a sheep. He vill not onderstand. I speaks to him and you hafs nodding to do. *Ja, ja.* I komm vis you."

Charles looked undecided. He had never gone for a walk with Frau Wolff before, and such familiarity was rather conspicuous. He glanced at her sideways. She was dressed for the daily constitutional she always took in the afternoon. Her skirts were tucked up with many loops and buttons, and showed her bare, sandal-bound feet. Her hat was a fluffy trifle of tulle and pink rosebuds, grotesquely childlike, and she was struggling to squeeze her hands into a pair of white kid gloves.

Supposing he met Myles? Those dreadful sandals! It made him shiver to look at them.

Frau Wolff was conscious of the shiver, but mistook its meaning. She looked down.

"I do ze Kur. You sink my feets is cold? Not at all. Vould you like for to feel zems?"

Charles put the breadth of the seat between himself and his companion.

"Certainly not," he said sharply.

Frau Wolff gave a fat, rumbling laugh. She was not in the least offended. She finished buttoning her gloves, and then stood up and shook out her skirts.

"We make ze walk. Komm wis me, I know zis man," and shooing Charles off the bench with waves of her parasol, she led the way across the courtyard.

Charles meekly put on his hat and followed. To his relief she avoided the most public pathway, and after leaving the Schloss grounds struck into a narrow road which led past the farm where the Rentiers had their quarters. A small wood of birch and pine bordered the banks of the stream, and half hidden among the trees stood a scattered group of old buildings, long since disused and tumbling into ruins.

The path was pretty and picturesque, and would have been more so, Charles thought, if the large figure in front of him had not blocked out so much of the view. There was only room to walk in single file, and he was following his companion so closely that when she stopped suddenly to take breath before

mounting a slight incline in the path he bumped into her. The shock jerked his eyeglasses off his nose, and the cord, catching on a drooping branch, snapped, and sent the glasses flying into the air. They quivered for a second in the sunshine, and then fell, broken into pieces.

Frau Wolff was voluble in expressions of condolence, and still more voluble in protest when Charles said he must return to the Schloss to fetch another pair. She was prepared to be eyes and ears and tongue to him. She would pilot him through every difficulty.

"You haf nodding to do but vears ze cloeses. I talk; I talk all ze time," she declared again and again.

Charles remained firm and carried his point. He must see his clothes fitted himself. If Frau Wolff would walk slowly on he would go back and then follow and overtake her.

She shrugged her massive shoulders and pointed to a seat at the top of the little incline. She would not walk on, she would sit there and wait for him. She watched him out of sight and then mounted heavily the few feet which led to the bench. It was a very hot afternoon, and she was not altogether sorry to rest for a while in the shade. The foliage

grew close all round, except just in front, where she gained peeps between the branches of the stream and the old farm. She had hardly seated herself when the sound of voices attracted her attention, and leaning forward she put up her lorgnettes.

There, just down below her, on the stretch of meadow grass between the stream and the ruined farmstead, were the young Baronin Seybell and the Englishman, and the little boy whose mother had gone to Cortina with Gräfin Rentier the day before.

Frau Wolff drew in a deep breath of satisfaction. With this before her eyes she did not mind how long she was kept waiting.

The scene she looked down upon was very pretty and domestic. Benjie was trying to sail a paper boat on a pool of shallow water, which was an overflow from the stream, and Myles and Vilma were sitting on the fallen trunk of a tree watching him. Vilma was talking and applauding the child's efforts. The sound of voices reached Frau Wolff, but she could not hear what was being said. She had barely grasped the outlines of the situation when another figure came into view. It was Leopoldina, evidently going to the dairy to fetch the milk for the child's supper, for

she was carrying a jug in her hand. There was some talk between her and the Englishman, and then she curtsied and went on her way.

She had not been gone more than two or three minutes when a new source of interest appeared. Frau Wolff grasped the handle of her lorgnettes tighter and stretched her neck to the utmost.

It was one of the hotel servants with what she was quite sure was a telegram for the Englishman; she could see the flimsy scrap of paper fluttering between his fingers when he spread it open. He stood reading it with his head down, and then took a step or two in the direction which Leopoldina had taken and called out something, but there was no answer. Leopoldina had disappeared amongst the trees.

Vilma rose from her seat, and Frau Wolff guessed what was being discussed, for Vilma pointed to the little boy and then walked across to the pool where he was playing and took his hand. The next thing Frau Wolff saw was the Englishman going very quickly back in the direction of the Schloss and the servant who had brought the telegram following behind.

Vilma held a red parasol over her head, which made a bright spot of colour against the green bank beyond. When Myles was out of sight she put it down, and with the handle hooked Benjie's paper boat out of the pool and threw it into the stream. The water was low, but the current caught it and it danced and bobbed over the stones as it was carried downwards. The child was delighted. Vilma still held his hand and he dragged her along with him until they reached a bend in the stream where it swept round at the back of the old farmstead.

"*Ach!*" exclaimed Frau Wolff, regaining her balance with an effort. She had nearly tumbled off the bench trying to follow the movements of the two figures, and they had suddenly disappeared. She heard the child's ringing laugh for a few seconds longer, and then followed complete silence.

She dropped her lorgnettes and looked at her watch. It was getting very near the time for the young Baronin to start on her journey. Frau Wolff knew exactly how long it would take for a carriage and pair with passengers and luggage to drive from Waldhof to the station.

A few minutes passed and Vilma reappeared,

but she was alone, and she walked leisurely across the grass almost in a direct line towards the place where Frau Wolff was sitting. As she drew nearer she smiled and waved her red parasol. Not at the watcher hidden behind the screen of trees, but at Mr. Egerton, who was coming to meet her from the opposite direction.

Frau Wolff drew back cautiously. They were now almost exactly under the spot where she sat. She could hear them speaking. Vilma's was a peculiarly high-pitched voice; every word rose distinct and clear.

"It is all right. The nurse came back and took him away."

"The Englishman's reply was less audible. He was evidently questioning, and Vilma answered him again with easy assurance.

"But I tell you it is quite all right. You would not meet them for they went back by another road."

Her voice trailed off, fainter as the distance lengthened, and Frau Wolff heard only the murmur of a deeper tone answer her. She rose and parted the branches in front.

The young Baronin and the Englishman were walking away in the direction of the Schloss, Vilma swinging her parasol carelessly

from side to side. She was in no hurry, although it was so near the time of her departure.

Frau Wolff returned to the seat and sat down again. Her busy brain was full of a new subject of speculation. She was not thinking of Vilma; she was thinking of how Leopoldina had managed to return from the dairy and take the little boy away without having been seen to cross the meadow below. She thought she knew all the paths in the neighbourhood of the Schloss, but evidently she was mistaken. Some day she would go and investigate the place for her own satisfaction.

She was deep in thought when Charles reappeared. He was very hot and apologetic. He had not expected to find her still waiting for him, but Frau Wolff made no comment on his length of absence. The time had not seemed long to her. She had been pleasantly occupied, but she did not tell him in what way. She was still puzzling over that little mystery of how Leopoldina had got back from the dairy without having been seen to cross the meadow.

CHAPTER XXII

VILMA'S REVENGE BEGINS TO WORK

FRAU WOLFF had seen a good deal, but she did not see Mr. Egerton leave Schloss Waldhof a little later in the company of Frau Baronin Seybell and Vilma.

It had all come about quite simply. Myles's telegram was an important one. As he walked back with Vilma to the Schloss he mentioned that he was going down to the office to send the answer to it himself, and she had offered him a seat in their carriage. They passed the telegraph office and it would save time and a hot, dusty walk.

The Frau Baronin had seconded the invitation, and now, as she watched him sitting opposite to her in the carriage, she thought, with a sigh, if only Providence would arrange for this Englishman to marry Vilma, what a merciful thing it would be. She had an instinctive trust in quiet men; they were stronger

than the ones who blustered and swore. Yes! If he would only marry Vilma and take her away to the respectability of his own country. She did not know much about England, but she was assured of its respectability. Vilma would be kept out of mischief there.

Myles would have been very much surprised if he had known what thoughts were passing through the mind of the little woman whose faded eyes looked at him pathetically from under the brim of her black mushroom hat. He saw the pathos and was sorry. The old Baron was a brute, he remembered, and bullied his wife abominably. A feeling of compunction smote him. He had not paid as much attention to the Seybells as he ought to have done since he had renewed his acquaintance with them at Waldhof, and now they were going away, and he would not have another chance of making up for his want of sociability. Vilma had annoyed him the night he had overheard her discussing Rudolf on the terrace, and he had kept out of her way since. She had made him feel very uncomfortable that afternoon by finding him out to say good-bye. He would not have accepted the offer of a seat in the carriage if it had not been for the Frau Baronin. Something in

the appeal of those faded eyes had touched him and prompted him to accept it.

He leaned forward on the narrow seat and exerted himself to be agreeable.

He succeeded almost too well, and the Frau Baronin's hopes soared still higher. There were almost tears in her eyes when she gave him her hand at parting, and timidly invited him to come and visit them the following winter in Vienna.

Vilma did not say much. It occurred to Myles that the smile which curled the corners of her red lips as she bent over the door of the carriage was a little malicious. She said good-bye, and then added, laughing:

"I wish you 'good luck.' That is an English expression which we also have."

Standing in the roadway, he watched the carriage disappear out of sight in a cloud of dust.

She had wished him "good luck." It was odd that she should have used that expression; its significance went deeper than she knew. A face—not Vilma's—came up before him. It had never been far away; it haunted him waking and sleeping. How would she greet him? he wondered for the hundredth time. How soon would he know what his answer was to be?

"I wish you 'good luck.'"

The words rang in his ears as he turned into the telegraph office, but he had forgotten all about Vilma.

It did not take him long to transact his business, for he rarely found difficulty in dealing with foreign officials. As he was leaving the place he asked which was the quickest way back to Waldhof? The man in charge, who had been impressed by the stranger's command of his own language, came to the door to explain where he would strike the path which led up to the Schloss through the woods. He assured him that he himself could do the distance in half an hour. Myles looked at the man's short legs and his own long ones and knocked ten minutes off the time. He was in a hurry to get back, because he was not altogether satisfied with himself for having left Benjie to be handed over to Leopoldina without explaining why he had been called away.

"The little chap will think I 've forgotten my promise," he told himself remorsefully. Benjie had extorted from him a promise that about the time his mother was expected to return he would take him a little bit down the road on the way to the station to meet her.

The childish request had been eagerly pleaded, and Myles had been humbly grateful for it. It was absurd, but he was as nervous as a girl about meeting Rose. He had thought of every conceivable way as to how and where and when he would see her again for the first time, and he laughed a little grimly to himself as he covered the ground with long, swinging strides. Love was making a fool of him. He had always prided himself on his self-reliance, and it was to the hand of a little child that he was trusting for help.

The beauty of the woodland path was lost on him; he kept looking straight ahead to where he would catch the first glimpse of Schloss Waldhof through the trees. It still wanted a little while to the time when the travellers were due, but the child was so excitable he would be waiting in a fever of impatience.

When he came out from the cover of the woods, the first thing he saw was Leopoldina standing by the gateway of the Schloss. She was shading her eyes with her hand, and her attitude was watchful and expectant. She was alone, a fact which struck him at once as curious. As soon as she saw him she came running down the slope and panted out

breathlessly the question: "Where was the *Kindchen?*"

Myles stopped short and stared at her.

"The child? He had been given back into her charge. What did she mean?"

A torrent of questions and protestations answered him. Myles had grown accustomed to the girl's *patois*, and he understood her better than he had done on the occasion of the night of the storm. Was she lying? he wondered. Had Benjie been up to one of his favourite tricks of running away and was she trying to excuse herself for not having kept better watch over him?

He spoke to her sternly in German.

"Tell me the truth. When you came back from the dairy, you found the child playing with his boat, as you had left him. What happened after that? How did you manage to lose him?"

Leopoldina wrung her hands despairingly.

When she returned from the dairy—and she had not stayed long, not one moment too long—the *Kindchen* and the Baronin and the Herr Englishman, all had disappeared. She had searched everywhere. At the Schloss she had been told that the Herr Englishman had driven away in the carriage with the

Frau Baronin Seybell and the young Baronin. One of the servants had seen him go; it was Marie. The carriage had been waiting for some time with all the luggage ready, and it had departed hurriedly at the last. Perhaps the *Kindchen* had gone with them, perhaps not. Marie could not remember having seen him, but then he was so small. He might have jumped into the carriage and been hidden by the hood which had been put up to keep off the dust.

Leopoldina called upon all the saints in the calendar to bear witness to the truth of what she was saying. With tears she implored Myles to tell her what he had done with the child. She had been watching and waiting for him; her mistress might return at any moment. What was she to do?

The girl did not look as if she were telling lies, and yet—Vilma's assurance when she had told him it was all right, quite all right. He did not attempt to give Leopoldina an explanation; he could not. A hideous fear of he knew not what gripped hold of him. "Come!" he said sharply, and started off to run, with Leopoldina following close behind.

Skirting the garden wall of the Schloss he made direct for the spot where he had last

seen Benjie and Vilma together. It took only a few minutes to reach it. The sun had dipped behind the hill and the place looked gloomy and deserted; the pool where the child had sailed his boat lay like a dark blot in the shadow; no white speck marked its surface.

He had taken the boat with him, thought Myles, as he ran on towards the banks of the stream. It might be some clue.

The water was low. It had fallen as rapidly after the storm as it had risen, and rippled smoothly over its shallow bed of sand and gravel. He followed its course round the bend behind the ruined farmstead; a rotting beam had fallen from one of the outhouses into the water, and flattened against it was a piece of sodden white paper.

He did not require to examine it; he knew what it was. Leopoldina, who was watching his every movement, uttered a frightened exclamation.

"No," he said shortly, glancing up and down the stream. There was n't a pool deep enough to drown a kitten.

He turned back towards the ruins, and although Leopoldina declared she had already been through them all before, he commenced

a systematic search of every hole and corner, making her begin at one point while he started from another. His heart misgave him as he groped his way in the semi-twilight; no child would ever hide for the best part of an hour in such an eerie, deserted place. Most of the sheds were roofless, only the cow-house, which after the Tyrolean custom burrowed down dark and cavernous below the level of the ground, remained intact. The door had fallen inwards, and the entrance stood wide open. From an iron grating a feeble gleam of light showed that the place was divided into two parts, and that the inner part was shut off by a rough wooden partition.

As he grew accustomed to the gloom he could distinguish objects looming out of the shadows, and on the earthen floor he saw marks among the litter of leaves and dried fern which showed that the ground had been recently disturbed. Something bright caught his eye. He stooped down and picked up a small object which sparkled in his hand as he turned it over.

It was a little heart-shaped trinket. It was quite familiar to him, for he had noticed it often hanging from a bangle on Vilma Seybell's wrist. He was on the brink of dis-

covery. From under the inner door something white protruded. Even in the dim light it was recognisable: the crushed brim of a child's hat.

He raised the door and pressed it inwards. His foot touched something soft, and he felt the cold sweat break out on his forehead, and that hideous fear took tangible form. It lay there—a little white heap. Horribly still; horribly limp! He knelt down, and gathering it into his arms stumbled out into the daylight.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SCAPEGOAT FOR A WOMAN'S TREACHERY

IT was good to be back at the old Schloss again. It felt like home, thought Rose, as she ran lightly up the old stone staircase.

Conscience smote her just a little; she ought not to be so light of foot and so light of heart. Rudolf and his impassioned declaration and his love and despair ought still to be fresh in her memory; but it seemed as though yesterday had suddenly sunk far into the background. Her horizon had narrowed down to one point. The present was real and vital and immediate.

The Schloss felt very quiet and hot and airless. She wondered why Benjie had not rushed out from some hiding-place to surprise her. She was later than she expected. Perhaps Leopoldina had concluded that she was not coming back by the train she had intended and taken him off to bed; but he certainly would not be asleep. She walked softly, and

opened the door of the nursery very gently. The room was empty and it looked painfully bare and tidy. No little garments scattered about, no splashings of bath water on the wooden boards, and the coverlet of the bed in the corner had not been turned down for the night.

The atmosphere was like an oven. She threw open the Venetian shutters, and went out on to the balcony. There was no one to be seen in the garden below, for it was the supper hour, but that did not account for Leopoldina's absence; Benjie always had his bread and milk in the nursery.

She stood by the balustrade and drummed her fingers impatiently on the wooden rail, uncertain whether to go down-stairs again or not. The door from the balcony into the corridor was a little ajar, and her ears were on the alert to catch every sound. Some one was coming up the stairs, and it was not Leopoldina. It was a man's footstep, and the colour flushed up into her cheeks. She moved nearer to the door, and stood behind it, listening. She thought she knew what had happened. Myles had kept his promise. He had taken Benjie out with him and was bringing him back.

The steps drew nearer. She had no doubts now as to who it was, only the silence puzzled her. There was no sound of childish chatter, and no scamper of little feet. She opened the door wide. Yes, it was Myles coming towards her, and he was carrying Benjie in his arms.

There was nothing unnatural in the child's appearance; he looked as though he were asleep, his head pillowed in the hollow of the arm which held him. But it was the expression in Myles's eyes which struck fear to her heart.

She was at his side in a moment.

"What is the matter? What have you done to him?" She held out her arms. "Give him to me."

He walked on into the nursery, and laid his burden gently down on the bed. Then he drew himself up, and said in a dull, mechanical voice, as though he had rehearsed the words beforehand:

"It is a faint. He got a fright."

There was the sound of hurrying footsteps; it was Leopoldina running along the corridor.

"Don't blame the girl," he said quickly. "It was my fault—I lost him."

For a moment Rose stared at him with dazed eyes.

"Lost him?"

Leopoldina burst into the room.

"It was my fault," repeated Myles. "Don't blame her."

Her glance swept him from head to foot. Then without a word she turned and bent over the bed.

Myles took a step forward.

"How can I help? Tell me what I can do," he asked.

She did not answer; she was kneeling by the bedside, quickly unfastening the child's clothes, feeling his heart, passing her hands over each limb. To Leopoldina, who stood by shaking with fright and excitement, she issued sharp, curt orders, checking with a peremptory gesture all attempts of explanation.

Cold water! Brandy! The smelling salts from her room! The doors and windows opened wider; every thought and sense was concentrated on one object. She did not look round to see who obeyed her. She did not know who it was who fetched the brandy or who took the spoon from Leopoldina's trembling fingers and measured the drops into it.

Myles saw the first quiver of the closed eyelids as soon as she did; saw the tightly-shut mouth relax, and a gasping sob shake the little body convulsively. He saw her draw the child into her arms, cradling the curly head against her bosom as she murmured tender, caressing words and smiled down into the widely opened eyes, which stared up at her with a lurking terror in their blue depths.

It was time for him to go. There was nothing more he could do, and she would hate the sight of him when she came back to a knowledge of her surroundings.

He left the room noiselessly and went down-stairs and out into the garden. He knew to which side her windows looked, and he made his way to the terrace below them. Pitiful sounds reached him from the room above. A little child's voice, now raised in shrill tones of fear, now dying away again into a sobbing wail; and ever answering, soothing, caressing, the soft murmur of another voice.

He could not bear it. He walked to the end of the terrace and stood there, his face upturned to the fading light, and a fury of anger raging within him.

Vilma's parting words rang in his ears.

"The damned devilishness of the woman!" he muttered fiercely through his teeth.

She had done this thing. Deliberately. Tricked him into this trap where he was bound hand and foot. To clear himself he could never accuse Vilma of this horrible piece of cold-blooded cruelty; he knew that he would have to take on himself the consequences of her deed.

Why had she done it?

Her face, staring at him from the dark archway outside the chapel door suddenly flashed up before him. A dull red rose to his brow when he asked himself again why she had done this thing.

He put his hand in his pocket and drew out the little trinket he had found lying on the floor of the cow-shed. A fragment of gold chain hung from it, and the last link was strained open where it had been wrenched from the bangle on Vilma's wrist. There had been a struggle, and the child had clung to her. She had torn herself free and shut him in behind that heavy door. He put the thing back out of sight: it sickened him. How long had the poor little tortured brain struggled with the terrors of darkness before un-

consciousness overpowered it? He wondered what effect a shock like that might have on an excitable child.

He went back to the window and looked up. A light had been lit and the child was quiet for the moment, but he heard the hushed sound of voices. One of them was Gräfin Rentier's, and he recognised the other as Leopoldina's.

It would all come out now. Everything was against him. Leopoldina had not been with him when he found Benjie; she could in no way connect Vilma Seybell with the child's disappearance.

He stood listening. In that room above, the woman he loved was being told the story of how he had kept his trust to her. She had trusted him. She would not have gone to Cortina if she had not trusted him; and she had trusted him for this! He groaned in spirit. The ghastly mockery of it all! As he listened, he felt like a man being put in his coffin alive, and not able to move a finger to prevent the lid from being screwed down.

He began to walk up and down again, pausing every time he passed beneath the lighted window, until darkness fell and the stars came out. The garden was very quiet;

a hot, sultry gloom hung over the old Schloss. When he came to the end of one of his measured beats and saw a white figure cross the pathway in front of him he was about to wheel round to avoid it when he recognised Gräfin Rentier. He wavered for a moment, and then followed, overtaking her as she came into the circle of light shining from the windows of the Lese Saal.

"*Ach!* but it is—it is Herr Egerton!" exclaimed Ilka. "You jump so quick out of the darkness—you frightened me."

"I 'm sorry," he said, and then stood looking at her, a world of question, entreaty, almost fear in his eyes.

Ilka returned the look, but her glance was alert, keen, and penetrating. He felt that she was reading him like a book, and that she guessed the secret of his love.

He did not resent the scrutiny of those bright eyes. Something told him that she was his friend. He knew it, and felt it instinctively. The paralysing sensation of helplessness slipped from him; he was himself again, ready to face whatever lay before him. "What am I to do?" he said simply.

She motioned him to follow her out of earshot of the window.

"I would speak with you, because there are some things I do not understand." She tapped her head significantly. "He did not fall over a precipice?"

"No."

"There has not been a blow here?" Again she touched her head.

"I don't think so. I examined him carefully. It—seemed to be a faint from—from fright."

"Ah, so, that is possible. The girl, his nurse, tells me she leave the little one with you, and he lose himself and you find him. It is a strange story which she tells. Is it true?"

"What else did she tell you?"

In a few quick sentences Ilka gave him Leopoldina's version of what had happened. It was all quite correct, but there was no mention of Vilma. Leopoldina had not connected the young Baronin with the child's disappearance.

Myles was conscious of a feeling of relief mixed with bitterness. There would be no complications to explain.

"What she says is quite true; she is not to blame. I told Mrs. Trevor so. It happened through my—carelessness."

Ilka glanced at him quickly and then looked down and tapped the ground with her foot. Her brows were drawn together; her pretty mouth pursed tightly. She shot another look up at him from under her lashes. There was in it an immense depth of comprehension.

"There is a mystery. Oh yes, but of course I understand. Your mouth is shut—locked tight. You allow Frau Trevor to think that you are a monster of cruelty, and you do this for the sake of—a point of honour." She shrugged her shoulders. "But you do not deceive me. Oh no, not at all!"

He looked away from her.

"Don't bother about me. Other things matter more." His eyes came back to her face. "Tell me how to help. I 'm outside, you see, and it 's rather awful. You 've been with Mrs. Trevor. What do you think? Is the child really ill? Is she frightened about him? Would she like a doctor? Is there anything wanted? Give me something to do."

Ilka's heart softened to him. He pleaded very humbly, and her quick wits told her that she would not surprise him into admitting anything that he did not wish to admit.

It was the Englishman's intention to keep his own counsel.

"The little one is in much fever. He is burning, and he will never sleep in such a state. He only becomes stupid, and then cries with some great fear, and then again becomes stupid. I have but this moment returned from speaking with the proprietor of the hotel to ask him if a messenger can be sent to the town to procure something from the *Apotheke*. He makes difficulties, for, of course, a special messenger is great expense. The little one is in such fever that he cannot sleep, and we have nothing to make him sleep; and that room where he lies! *Mein Gott!* it is like the Inferno! He cannot breathe! He will die in such heat!"

"Can't he be moved into a cooler room?" said Myles.

Ilka threw out her hands.

"When one is not rich, one cannot command the best rooms."

Myles had taken a note-book from his pocket while she was speaking. He tore out a leaf and gave it to her, with a pencil.

"Write down what you want," he said, "and I will see that the things are sent for."

Ilka balanced the pencil between her fingers; she was a very practical person.

"The proprietor? He may give Frau Trevor much expense."

"Frau Trevor is not to know anything about it."

Myles looked straight into Ilka's eyes and his own expressed a good deal.

"You will be my friend, won't you? You must know how I feel. I can't help her by myself, she would not let me, but I can through you. If she asks any questions, you can—well, you can make it seem all right, can't you—without bringing me in?"

Ilka's eyes sparkled.

"We conspire together? A little intrigue? I understand," and she began to scribble hastily on the page of the note-book.

"About the rooms," continued Myles. "There are some big airy ones empty downstairs that open on to the verandah."

"My friend," said Ilka, looking up, "you are not modest. These rooms are the best in the hotel. They are let *en suite*, and I believe are reserved for some distinguished personage. The proprietor will assuredly say no!"

"He has his price, I suppose?"

"All such people have. But it will be colossāl!"

"I think he will see the necessity of giving us the rooms," answered Myles, quietly. "And that list? You 've finished it. If you give it me I will arrange for the things you want to be sent for."

Ilka folded the paper into a narrow slip.

"You know how to be a good friend," she said, as she gave it to him. "But—you do not tell much. I believe you have been walking up and down in the dark all alone and calling yourself damn, damn, damn, a great many times. Is not that so?"

"Something like it."

"It has doubtless refreshed you to say such words. Do you know," she added, patting the bosom of her dress, "that a little voice here tells me that you are to be trusted? There is a mystery. You do not deceive me —oh no, not at all! But I know that you are to be trusted altogether."

Myles was not a demonstrative man. He only took her hand and wrung it hard.

"Thank you," he said.

CHAPTER XXIV

FRAU WOLFF OPENS RUDOLF'S EYES

FRAU WOLFF was to all appearances a tactless, inquisitive old busybody; but she also possessed a secretive cunning, a jackdawish propensity for hoarding information, which she hugged jealously to herself until the moment came when she chose to disclose it.

During the days which followed the departure of the Seybells and the return of Gräfin Rentier and Mrs. Trevor from Cortina, her opera glasses and her questioning tongue had been very busy, and she learned all there was to learn of the gossip in the hotel concerning the accident to the little English boy.

That it had been an accident she found was an accepted fact. She picked the brains of every one who allowed their brains to be picked, but did not volunteer any information of her own account.

The whole of that week she found very interesting. The little English boy had been

really ill, and Frau Trevor must be much richer than was supposed, because every luxury of which the hotel could boast seemed to be at her disposal. She now occupied the most expensive suite of rooms on the ground floor, opening on to a private part of the verandah, and a special messenger went daily to the nearest town and returned with mysterious packages which Frau Wolff knew found their way to these rooms. She had tried questioning the hotel proprietor about them, but had found him very stupid.

One evening a travelling carriage had arrived at the Schloss and Frau Wolff had caught a glimpse of its occupant as he had alighted. She had recognised him instantly. It was not for nothing that she studied the photographs of the celebrities of the day. He was one of the great doctors in Vienna, the well-known brain specialist, and it was evident that he had worked a miracle, for only two or three days after his visit she saw the little invalid lying on a couch on the verandah.

During that week Frau Wolff had paid several visits to the old ruins at the farm. What she expected to find there she would have been at a loss to explain, but a voice seemed continually to call her to the spot,

and on the last day of that week she determined to make one more visit to the place. The Kur was finished, and her time at Waldhof had come to an end; she was leaving the Schloss the next morning.

She started earlier than usual for her constitutional that afternoon, and as she passed through the garden the sound of children's voices came to her from the direction of Frau Trevor's rooms. The little boy must certainly be much better, for the son of the Frau Hauptman was playing with him on the verandah. She caught a glimpse through the creepers of Franz's fat legs as he wheeled the smaller child up and down in a little carriage. That little carriage was a new and most extravagant toy. She had seen it being taken across the courtyard only the day before by one of the hotel servants; Frau Trevor must indeed be rich.

. . . . . .

Half an hour later Rudolf Schölan, riding through the forest on his way back to Waldhof after a week's absence, drew rein as he came in sight of the old Schloss. He had been in the saddle since daybreak. The manœuvres had practically come to an end that morning, and during the last week officers and men

had been worked hard. He had ridden on in advance of the General and his staff. His horse was tired, and he was tired himself; tired and depressed and out of tune with everything.

In ordinary circumstances he would not have minded the hard work, and would not have cared whether his duty had kept him at Waldhof or taken him farther afield; but it happened that everything he cared for just then centred round Waldhof. He had never found a week so long or soldiering so irksome.

He allowed the reins to drop on his horse's neck, and looked ahead. The grey towers of Schloss Waldhof basking in the brilliant sunshine mocked him; his love was there, but she was as far away from him as though she inhabited another world. He had heard the gossip about the accident and knew that she shut herself up in her own rooms and devoted herself to the child and did not see any one. He wondered if she would allow him to say good-bye to her. A last good-bye, for the camp broke up the following day.

He touched his tired horse lightly with his spur as a reminder to move on. In front lay the stream, and jutting into it at that particular spot were the ruins of the old farm.

There was a bridge by which he could have crossed to the other side higher up, but he put his horse at the water and splashed through. As the animal scrambled up the bank on the farther side, he saw a figure emerging from the doorway of one of the outhouses. It was Frau Wolff. He glanced at her with careless contempt and was riding on when something in her appearance struck him as peculiar. She had evidently been taken by surprise and had a furtive look as though she had been caught in the act of doing something which she ought not to have been doing. Cobwebs were smeared over her dress and over the tulle trimmings of her hat; she was very hot, and looked as if she had been crawling about on her hands and knees in the dust.

Frau Wolff was more than surprised. The young Baron coming upon her so unexpectedly had given her a fright. She had been holding up something in her hand which glittered; she hastily tried to hide it, but only succeeded in drawing attention to her action.

Her face went a dull red as she saw Rudolf's expression change from contempt to one of frank suspicion. He did not take the trouble to hide what he thought, and she hated the

young aristocrat at that moment; hated him with the sullen, smouldering, hatred of race bitterness. He was aristocrat, and he made her feel it. She was a contemptible creature in his sight.

Rudolf had checked his horse. He sat quite still and watched her; his eyes, sharp and questioning, going from her face to the object she was holding in her hand. It was a gold bangle, and it belonged to Vilma Seybell. He had reason to know that, for he had given it to her himself during the brief period when she had caught his fancy.

Frau Wolff's dull skin took on a deeper glow. The look of suspicion on the young soldier's face roused in her a fury of resentment. She shook the bangle above her head, and the torrent of her wrath descended on him like the bursting of a cyclone. Quick-witted as he was, he failed to grasp the meaning of what she was talking about. It sounded like a violent denunciation of the whole social circle of Schloss Waldhof. She scoffed derisively as she held them up to ridicule. They despised her, these aristocrats? But it was she—she, Frau Wolff, alone who had found out a mystery which had taken place in their midst. She held the key to a secret which

placed the reputation of one of the haughtiest of their set at her mercy.

Rudolf's blue eyes narrowed and he bent a little forward in his saddle. What did the woman mean? She stood before him waving her arms and gesticulating like a creature possessed. It was the supreme moment of her life! For once she had risen above the narrowness of her circumstances; she compelled attention: she revelled in the glory of her triumph.

With a lucidity which was as remarkable as had been the incoherence of her first attack, her story narrowed, centred, condensed, round three people—the Englishman and Frau Trevor and the young Baronin Seybell. Then the light burst upon Rudolf, for she spared him nothing. He could not silence her. He was forced to listen to the story of Vilma's love and jealousy and hatred.

And it meant what? That it was the Englishman who was his rival.

His heart seemed to give a great bound and jump back into its proper place. He sat more erect in his saddle, and the hand resting on the hilt of his sword tightened its grip. The fighting instinct stirred in his hot young blood.

Frau Wolff's voice rose in a crescendo scream as she went on to describe Vilma's pitiless cruelty of revenge.

"With my own eyes I witnessed how the Baronin Seybell revenged herself." She pointed backwards to the dark shed from which she had just emerged, and then to the bank where she had sat and watched and spied and listened, and shook the bangle again above her head, as with shrill emphasis she described the scene for Rudolf's further enlightenment.

The finding of that bangle had put the crowning touch to her triumph. It convicted Vilma without a doubt. It had been found on the floor of the old cow-shed among the litter and rubbish, and it had been torn from Vilma's wrist in her struggle with the child when she had shut him in behind that great heavy door. And all Waldhof thought that the illness of Frau Trevor's little boy was the result of an accident, and that it was the Englishman who was to blame for the accident. Why? Because the Englishman would not speak! He knew what the Baronin Seybell had done. He knew that all Waldhof and Frau Trevor believed that it was his fault, but he would not speak; he would not

clear himself. He would not betray the Baronin Seybell.

Frau Wolff laughed scornfully. How clever the Baronin Seybell had been! How she had fooled the Englishman! Fooled him with a few smiling words; lured him from the spot and carried him away with her from Waldhof, so that he was compromised utterly. Had not Frau Wolff heard her tell the Englishman that the child was safe, that he had been taken back to the Schloss by his nurse, and all the time he was shut in behind that great heavy door? Ah yes, the young Baronin was clever. She had determined to have her revenge, and she had gained it.

Rudolf held up his hand with a gesture of command. He did not doubt Frau Wolff's story, it was too circumstantial for doubt. He had no respect for Vilma, and no sentiment regarding her. Her conduct had been infamous, but she was of his own race, and for the sake of the name she bore he could not leave her reputation at the mercy of this woman's scurrilous tongue.

With a quick movement he brought his horse up in front of Frau Wolff. The action disconcerted her, and she lurched heavily backwards. He bent from the saddle, and

before she realised what he was going to do, he had taken the bangle out of her hand. "It is the Baronin Seybell's," he said. "I will give it back to her." He gave a jerk to the reins, and putting his horse into a sharp trot was half-way across the meadow by the time she had recovered herself.

He paid no attention to the language which followed him. Frau Wolff's story would lose its point now that she had no proof to show of its veracity, and he put the bangle in his pocket. He did not know what he intended to do with it, but it was quite impossible that it should remain in the possession of Frau Wolff.

As he rode on across the meadow, he was thinking much more of Myles Egerton as his rival in love than he was of Vilma Seybell. He was prickling all over with excitement; he thirsted to do something actively hostile. He would like to call out the Englishman that minute and fight him. How was it that he had never guessed that he was his rival?

It was in such a state of mind that he rode into the stable-yard. Duty, in the shape, of a mounted orderly, who was unfastening a heavy mail-bag from his saddle, met him at the entrance. He answered the man's salute,

and swung himself stiffly off his horse. The half of his day's work still lay before him, and thoughts of calling out his rival must wait.

During the remainder of the afternoon he was kept too busy to have time to think of the extraordinary story he had heard from Frau Wolff. It was close upon six o'clock before he found himself free, and then he realised that he was very hungry, for he had not touched food since early morning.

He went over to the restaurant and ordered supper and something to drink at once. Marie welcomed him with a beaming smile, and hurried away to give the order, and was quickly back again with a foaming glass of beer, which he drained off at one draught and held out to be refilled.

Schloss Waldhof was famed for its beer, and in the hottest weather it was always of a delicious coolness. It was kept in small pine barrels, which were sunk in the old well in the garden during the heat of the day, and brought up to be broached just before the supper hour.

Rudolf raised the second glass to his lips, and smiled at Marie over the rim. Marie knew that she was being admired. All the servants adored Rudolf, and she chattered

to him as she arranged the dishes on the table, gratified that it had fallen to her turn to wait upon him.

The Saal was empty, at least so Rudolf thought, for the hour was yet early. He had half drained his second glass when his eyes, happening to stray beyond Marie's plump figure, became fixed, and the smile vanished from his face.

"*Sacrament!*" he muttered.

The room was not empty. A solitary figure was seated in the alcove by the window at the far end. It was the Englishman. He had changed his position during the last minute and come prominently into notice

Marie just then placed a dish on the table, and took off the cover.

Calf's head stewed in mushrooms. An excellent supper, and Rudolf was very hungry. He bent over his plate and picked up his knife and fork.

Love and jealousy were raging within him. He was thirsting for a fight; but it was necessary to eat, and while he was eating he would think of what he was going to do about his rival. Apparently engrossed in chopping up a plate of salad, he shot quick glances across the room, and something in the attitude

of the quiet figure sitting by the window made him feel strangely unappreciative of the good fare in front of him.

He ate mechanically. He caught himself more than once staring at a mouthful on the end of his fork, and then putting it down again untasted. He began to wonder how long the Englishman had been sitting there. He sat so very quiet, and he was neither eating nor drinking, and paid no attention to his surroundings.

Rudolf moved uncomfortably. He had always liked the Englishman, and it was only that afternoon that he had discovered that he was his rival. The grudge he bore was not of long standing.

The next time he glanced across the room that motionless figure in some way seemed to reproach him. The man looked ill, and the angularity of his tall figure was very noticeable. His features seemed to have sharpened; he had not looked like that a week ago.

Rudolf beckoned to Marie and told her to bring him a cup of strong black coffee and a small cognac, and he waved aside his plate with a gesture of repugnance.

Marie brought the coffee. She looked distressed. The Herr Baron was not pleased

with his supper? Was it not good? Should she bring something else? He paid no attention to her, and she noticed the direction in which his eyes strayed. She shrugged her shoulders expressively. The English Herr also did not eat, but that was nothing unusual. It was often so, since that affair of the accident. The Herr Baron had of course heard of the accident?

Rudolf pretended that he had not heard, and Marie was quite ready to enlighten his ignorance. Rudolf wanted to find out how her story would tally with Frau Wolff's, and it did so far as to account for little Benjie Trevor's illness. It threw the entire blame of what had happened on the Englishman, and Marie gave it as her private opinion that his position at Waldhof must be a most unenviable one. What must Frau Trevor think of him? The child had nearly died.

When Marie was called away to attend to some fresh comers Rudolf lit a cigarette and, leaning back in his chair, watched the rings of smoke curl into little spiral columns above his head. He put his hand in his pocket and felt the hard outline of Vilma's bangle. Vilma was a fiend, an inhuman monster. It was hardly conceivable that a woman could behave

with such cruelty to a little child; and then to go away and leave the Englishman to bear the blame! It had been a despicable way of satisfying her jealousy.

Rudolf smoked hard. He wished that his brain would not suggest so many uncomfortable ideas, for the other man's point of view kept thrusting itself into notice. He wondered how he would feel himself if he were in the Englishman's place. The Englishman loved Frau Trevor. That must make his position almost unbearable. To know that he was not to blame and to feel in honour bound to shield Vilma Seybell!

"Poor devil!" muttered Rudolf, and a thought flashed through his mind. "Why should you not profit by your rival's fall? You have only to keep silent. No one will find out the truth if you do not speak." That was the thought.

The good and the bad in him fought hard. He smoked furiously, then dashing his cigarette into his coffee cup, he held it down and watched it splutter out amongst the dregs.

"Poor devil! and it was all a mistake—a mistake!"

He repeated and repeated the last two words. No one knew that it was a mistake,

and it would remain a mistake, for the Englishman would not speak. He intended to shield Vilma, and so long as Rudolf kept silence no one would know, for Frau Wolff did not count. He had clipped her wings when he had taken away Vilma's bangle.

"I want always to think of you as I have known you—chivalrous, and truly a gentleman."

She had said that, and she had looked at him with that look which he loved so well when she had spoken these words. Could he ever feel chivalrous again if he allowed this wrong? That solitary figure sitting alone over there, how it reproached him! He could not keep his eyes away from it. He saw Myles take his cigarette case out of his pocket and open it; he shut it slowly, and put it back again. It was empty. Rudolf winced. The man had eaten nothing, he had drunk nothing, and he had nothing to smoke. That last nothing turned the scale; a small thing, but it touched Rudolf.

Myles had been paying very little attention to anything which was going on in the room. He heard a footstep and the click of a spur, but did not turn his head until a voice addressed him by name.

He looked up.

"Good-evening," said Rudolf. He held an open cigarette case in his hand, and there was an odd look on his boyish face; eager, almost apologetic. "Will you smoke with me? I find it *langweilig* to smoke alone.

Myles's face lightened; he put his hand on the back of a chair and pushed it forward.

"Thanks," he said. "Won't you sit down?"

Rudolf accepted the chair and began to talk at once. He plunged into the subject which was uppermost in his mind, for he never had any difficulty in expressing himself, and he was unhampered by self-consciousness. He had made up his mind during the last half minute what he was going to do, and he was impatient to get it done. If Myles had tried to stop him, it would have had no effect whatever. He gave no time for remonstrance; he began at the beginning of Frau Wolff's story and he finished it to the end; he told it in an incredibly short space of time, and he wound up with a scathing criticism on Vilma's conduct.

If he expected that Myles would open his heart to him, he counted upon more than he got. Perhaps he did not expect it. He knew that it was a peculiarity of Englishmen

to like to hide their feelings, and that the more they felt the less they showed.

In some inexplicable way these two men, curiously unlike, came to an understanding of each other. On Myles's part it was arrived at more by what was left unsaid than by what was said. He hardly spoke at all. He admitted nothing, and Vilma's name did not pass his lips; but Rudolf knew that Frau Wolff's story was true. He felt a profound admiration for this man who preferred to hold his tongue and allow himself to be misunderstood rather than clear himself at the expense of the woman who had betrayed him. And Vilma was not worth the sacrifice. It was all wrong, and instead of triumphing, Vilma ought to be punished.

He felt again in his pocket for the bangle and pinched it with satisfaction. Some day he would give Vilma a fright with that bangle.

The room was filling rapidly. Rudolf rose from his seat and stood looking down at his companion. He realised that Myles would never try to clear himself, and he respected his silence.

"It is conceivable that we do not meet again," he said.

"Your camp breaks up to-morrow?" answered Myles.

Rudolf nodded.

"There is an Inspection, and then—we march. So! It is the life of the soldier." He held out his hand and bowed courteously. "I would wish to say that it has been a great pleasure to make your acquaintance. I like you very much."

Myles felt strangely touched. He returned the hand-grasp warmly and watched the slight soldierly figure thread its way down the length of the crowded room. Many eyes turned in the same direction, and many voices called out a greeting; the something which was lovable in Rudolf appealed to men and women alike.

As he reached the door a group of officers entered, and among them was General Rentier. The General drew him aside and entered into animated conversation; they were still talking when Myles left the Saal.

Myles stood on the restaurant steps outside, wondering what he was going to do with himself for the rest of the evening. The door behind opened again; Rudolf had followed him.

"You make a walk?" he asked.

"I don't know. Yes—I think I shall. Will you come?"

Rudolf laughed and shook his head.

"I thank you very much, but I have business to make." He looked up at the sky, and then all round. "The day has been hot. In the Kastanienwald it will now be very agreeable."

"Yes," Myles answered indifferently. He might as well go to the Kastanienwald as any other place.

Some one called Rudolf from within.

"Good-night," said Myles. "I 'm sorry you can't come."

He looked back as he passed out of the gateway; Rudolf was still standing where he had left him. He appeared to be watching, and then his name was called once more, and Ilka Rentier came out on to the steps. They spoke together for a few seconds and Rudolf pointed to the garden. Ilka nodded and he took her arm, and together they walked down the terrace and were lost sight of amongst the bushes.

"I wonder if he will tell her," thought Myles as he continued his way.

CHAPTER XXV

A WELL-MEANING BLUNDERER

"MUVVER, muvver, do look at me whippin' Franz! An' he 's kickin' dust like a horse."

"Yes, my darling, I 'm looking," and Rose glanced up from the piece of work in her hand. "Poor Franz," she murmured, and then raised her voice. "Not so hard, Benjie. He has n't got any stockings on."

"But his legs is so fat. He does n't feel, muvver."

Franz continued ponderously to imitate the prancings of a restive steed. He was conscientiously endeavouring to do his best, and he kicked with stolid energy and made plenty of noise. His driver stood up in the little carriage and flourished the whip round his head, urging him to fresh efforts.

Rose laid down her work to watch the children. It was such a joy to hear Benjie happy, noisily happy again. Involuntarily

she shuddered when she thought of those dreadful days and still more dreadful nights when the little voice had been one long continued wail of fear and pain; when blistered lips babbled pitiful nonsense; when sleep refused to close the staring eyes and little hot hands clung to hers, imploring for she knew not what.

The child had been very ill. It seemed incredible that he should have recovered so quickly. She was quite sure he would not have recovered if it had not been for the kindness of these warm-hearted people at Waldhof. She sat and pondered over it all. It made her feel that she had never appreciated human sympathy at its proper worth before, and from the most unexpected quarters had come her greatest help. The hotel proprietor, whom she had previously looked upon as a hard man of business and quite devoid of sentiment, had shown a consideration and forethought which had been quite extraordinary. He had placed his best suite of rooms at her disposal and begged her as a favour to occupy them. He had always been ready to send messengers to the town when required; hardly a day had passed without bringing some proof of his civility. Her eyes rested

on the children again. That little carriage had been his latest attention. He had sent it over to her rooms the day before with a polite message delivered by Ilka to the effect that he would be proud if Frau Trevor would make use of it for the amusement of the *Kindchen*. It was only lent, of course; she would not have accepted it otherwise.

Rose felt a twinge of conscience when she thought of how unquestioningly she had trusted everything to Ilka during the last week. It was Ilka who had managed and explained and smoothed out every difficulty. Some things had been a little puzzling. That affair of the doctor, for instance; she must have that made clearer, and her brow contracted into an anxious frown. Ilka had explained about his coming, but she had been too anxious at the time to worry over explanations.

That doctor had saved Benjie's life—she was sure of that. He had made the child sleep. She felt that she would never forget the passion of relief, the agony of gratitude which had trembled through her when she had watched the heavy eyelids close over the burning eyes. He had slept. Long hours of deep sleep, from which he had wakened languidly

to eat and then to fall asleep again. And when exhaustion had passed, and the quick vitality of childhood had reasserted itself, it was as though a curtain had been dropped between the present and the past. Behind that impenetrable veil of sleep lay all the horror and pain and fear; it was forgotten, blotted out.

From thinking of these things she was roused by Leopoldina, who appeared carrying a large bunch of flowers and a basket of cherries. Rose took the cards which accompanied these offerings. She read the complimentary greetings and then laid them down again. It would almost have seemed as though the bits of cardboard had disappointed her. The flowers and fruit were from visitors in the hotel, and she was continually receiving such marks of friendliness. Every one had shown kindness to her, gone out of their way to express their sympathy. Every one except —she drew in her breath sharply, and buried her face amongst the flowers. Why, she asked herself, and she had asked herself the same question many times, had Mr. Egerton never shown regret for what had happened? Since that evening when he had carried the unconscious child up-stairs in his arms and laid

him on the bed in the nursery she had not seen him, had hardly heard his name mentioned. She was too proud to speak of him, even to Ilka, but she was hurt and sore and disappointed. He had ignored the child's illness. Such heartless indifference was inexplicable, for she could not forget that he had admitted that it was his fault. She could recall now the expression on his face when he had told her that, and he had not looked indifferent then. Bit by bit lately the details of that evening had come back to her out of a confused nightmare of horror. He had not left the room at once. Subconsciously she had been aware of his presence. She remembered now turning away from him, stunned, stupefied at the blow he had dealt her. The instinct of mother-love had roused in her something almost savage. What had she done? What had she said? She could not remember.

In her terror perhaps she had sent him from her with bitter words; but he ought to have known—if he loved her.

Was it true, she asked herself, that he had ever told her that he loved her? She was beginning to doubt. How could he forget? And if he remembered, how could he remain

indifferent? Twist it which way she could she found no excuse for him.

That morning she had questioned Leopoldina as to how she had come to let the child out of her care, and Leopoldina, in retelling the story, had remembered details which in her first excitement she had passed over. She mentioned one or two things. The young Baronin Seybell had been with the Herr Englishman that afternoon, and when the Seybells had left Schloss Waldhof he had driven away with them in their carriage.

Rose asked no further questions; but she felt very bitter. He had forgotten so easily. She did not realise how strong her faith had been in him until he had failed her.

She would not allow herself to think of him. She had made that resolution before and broken it. It filled her with self-contempt to find that her will was weaker than her resolution.

Benjie's voice recalled her to the present.

"Muvver, may n't we go dust a tiny little bit in the garden?"

She went over to where the children were playing, and Franz looked up at her interrogatively with round solemn eyes. He had been told by his mother that he was to talk

English when he was with Frau Trevor, but he was not of an enterprising nature and he was a child of few words.

"*Abendessen*," he said, and smacked his lips.

Rose smiled. Franz never forgot his supper hour.

"That means that you must go home," she said. "You have been very kind to Benjie. You have played with him so nicely. Will you come again to-morrow?"

Franz shook his head, and then Rose remembered that the camp at Waldhof was to break up the next day and that the Frau Hauptman would be leaving with the other officers' wives.

"You will come and say good-bye then," she said, and picked out a large bunch of cherries from the basket beside her.

He made a funny little stiff bow, and kissed her hand and said "*Danke schön*" very politely, and went away.

"Muvver, I did so want to go a tiny little bit in the garden," pleaded Benjie.

Rose considered. She was so afraid of allowing him to romp in case he got excited. Now that he was comparatively well her difficulty was to keep him quiet. The little

carriage had taken hours of anxiety off her mind, for he was never tired of playing with it. It was so real. The hood went up and down, and the door handles opened and shut with a fascinating click, and it had silver lamps with green candles in them, and the whip was exactly like a real carriage whip.

Benjie saw that she was yielding.

"Please, muvver. I won't whip near as hard as I whipped Franz—an' you can kick!"

"Can I?" She laughed at his earnestness.

He helped to push the carriage over the step, and fastened the reins round her waist.

"Now jump in," she said, "and sit tight, because perhaps I 'll run away."

It was easier to run away than she had expected. The part of the garden beyond the verandah was a wild bit of ground where the foliage straggled in luxuriant profusion and hid the dangers of the narrow pathways. The little carriage was as springy and light as a ball on its rubber-tyred wheels, and ran of its own accord. With Benjie pulling at the reins and dragging her this way and that, she found she was incapable of guiding it. Before they had gone very far there was a scurry and a scramble, a few hair-breadth

escapes round corners, and Benjie was landed in a rose-bush.

"I knowed we 'd do that!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet. "Is n't it fun, muvver? Let 's do it again."

"No, indeed," she answered. "It 's much too exciting; and oh, what a pity! Look how we 've scratched the paint." She righted the carriage and showed him the marks. "It 's no good my being the horse. I 'll have to push behind, and you must pretend you 're driving."

"Pertendin' is n't much fun, and—we 've losted the whip."

Before she could stop him he had broken away, and a sharp corner hid him from sight. She heard voices, Benjie's and another's, and walked back a few steps. Then she stopped. She had never spoken to Mr. Ridley, but she knew him quite well by sight. He was standing in the pathway holding Benjie's whip in his hand, and the child was planted in front of him, his hands behind his back in his favourite attitude, assuring him with eager politeness that the whip belonged to him.

Charles did not see Rose. He could see nothing just then except what was immediately beneath his notice. He had been taken

by surprise, and it was a painful and startling surprise. The little face looking up into his was such an exact counterpart of the dead Cyril Trevor's. A rush of long-forgotten memories swept up before him.

"Cyril," he murmured huskily, bending down.

"I 'm Benjie," answered the child. "An' —please, may I has my whip?"

"Benjie, Benjamin? Yes, of course, of course." Charles fumbled with his eye-glass string. "Benjie. But you 're— Dear, dear, how very like." He hesitated. "I—thought you were another little boy."

Benjie was very anxious to get back his whip, which was dangling just above him, and it was rude to snatch.

"I 'm Benjie. I 'm not another little boy. An' please—may I has my whip?"

Charles recovered himself with an effort.

"Your whip? Yes, my little man. There 's your whip. I 'm so glad I found it. It 's a very pretty whip."

"Yes, is n't it?" Benjie fingered the lash lovingly. "Thank you very much." He was turning to run back when a thought struck him. "Would you like to see my carriage? It 's the beautifulest carriage. It 's—it 's—"

Words failed him. He seized Charles's hand. "Come and see," he cried.

Only then was Mr. Ridley aware that the child's mother was standing near. He had never seen Rose except in the distance, and he had formed no idea of what she was like. To speculate as to her appearance had not occurred to him. Dragged into her presence without any warning, he received a great shock, for she burst upon him as quite a startling revelation. He felt himself to be blushing furiously. He felt that he ought not to look at her. It was rude, but he could not help it. He stood and blinked and blushed, and murmured:

"Poor Cyril—no wonder, no wonder; dear, dear, no wonder." Then he blushed hotter, and hoped fervently she had not heard.

Rose had drawn back when she recognised Mr. Ridley. The meeting was as embarrassing for her as it was for him. She concluded he knew who she was. Then her face softened, for she was always so very sorry for shy people. They suffered such agonies of self-consciousness for no use at all, and she tried to put him at his ease.

"Thank you so much for finding our whip.

It must have tumbled out when we ran down the bank," and she smiled.

The smile was too much for Charles. He dropped his eye-glasses, and then put them on again and apologised, although there was nothing to apologise for.

She made worse havoc by smiling again.

"We have n't tried the garden paths before, and they are so slippery. But my little boy grew tired of playing on the verandah."

"Yes, yes; of course I heard. I hope he is better? I hope he has——"

Charles stammered and broke off. It was somehow conveyed to him that she did not wish him to speak before the child of his illness. To cover his confusion he stooped down and patted Benjie on the head. It seemed a safe thing to do. People generally patted children.

Benjie twisted round and round and stared up at Charles until Rose grew uneasy. She was afraid of his making personal remarks which might not be complimentary, and she said something to draw his attention to the little carriage. In a moment he was all eagerness to show it off. He hopped in and out, and clicked the doors, and bumped up and down on the red velvet cushions, and

smothering himself underneath the hood had to wriggle out feet foremost.

Charles beamed through his eye-glasses and admired and praised. He had been feeling lonely and depressed that afternoon. The child's chatter and the mother's soft voice were pleasant to his ears. English voices! He was so tired of the continuous gabble of a tongue which he could not understand.

"It is certainly wonderful how ingeniously such things can be made," he said, appealing shyly to Rose.

"It is almost too fascinating," she answered. "I wish we could keep it always."

"But I 'm goin' to keep it," exclaimed Benjie. "I 'm goin' to keep it always, muvver."

"Of course, of course," chimed in Charles.

Rose made a deprecatory movement of her hands.

"I dare not encourage him in false hopes. It is only lent to us. We must give it back."

"Lent?" echoed Charles. "I—I thought —I was under the impression that it had been given to your little boy."

She looked at him in surprise, and wondered

how he knew anything about the child's plaything.

"It is only lent," she repeated, and hoped he would have the tact to say nothing more.

But tact was not Charles's strong point; he persisted. He was less nervous now, and a delicious feeling of importance swelled within him. He laughed—quite a knowing little laugh—and patted Benjie's head again.

"I know all about it," he said. "It 's yours, to do just what you like with." He turned to Rose, hastening to explain. "I am quite sure that Mr.——" then he stopped, some faint doubt crossing his mind.

"You mean the hotel proprietor," said Rose. "He lent it to us, but we have to give it back."

Benjie pulled at her skirt. His face was very red.

"Muvver, he says it' s mine," he cried excitedly.

Charles was much perturbed. It was so unnecessary that the child should be disappointed, and all through some muddle probably of the hotel keeper's. He smiled and nodded down into the eager face upraised to his. It was so fortunate that he could put this stupid mistake right, for it happened that he knew

all about it. That little carriage had arrived only the day before, packed in a case and addressed to Myles. Myles was absent and Charles had been asked to sign the receipt for the delivery of the package. He remembered all the circumstances distinctly. The contents of the package had to be examined and declared before him by the official who had delivered it. It had been very confusing, as he could not understand what the man said. He had ventured to ask Myles afterwards what he intended to do with such a curious thing—a child's perambulator practically—and Myles had answered rather vaguely. Now, of course, he understood. It was like Myles to give a present and not say much about it.

Charles felt quite genial and paternal, almost as if he had given the present himself.

"It 's your very, very own, my little man." He rubbed his hands softly together and smiled at the child, and then addressed himself to the mother. "I feel that I am justified in clearing up this misunderstanding. I am sure my friend, Mr. Egerton, will be very much annoyed when he hears it. Of course, he intended your little boy to keep the carriage."

Rose flushed crimson. She was on the

point of speaking, and then checked herself. Charles was quite unconscious of the effect his words had produced, and he was not looking at her. He had been seized upon by Benjie, who was trying to fasten a pair of red leather reins round his waist. Feebly he protested and revolved like a dying teetotum in his efforts to free himself.

"Muvver, do look!" cried the child.

"Benjie, come here!"

The tone was so sharp and peremptory, so unlike his mother's, that Benjie stared and dropped the reins.

What happened after that Charles never could quite remember. He was n't exactly dismissed, but he was helped out of the way. Mrs. Trevor's manner had been peculiar. Perhaps she was offended because he did not play with the child.

Benjie watched him go regretfully.

"What a funny red face he 's got, muvver. D' ye sink he 'd been cryin'?" he asked.

"I don't know," answered Rose, and she was quite silent as she wheeled him back to the verandah.

She found Ilka Rentier sitting in the chair she had left only a short time ago. Ilka was picking out the ripest cherries from the basket

on the table beside her, and when she caught sight of Rose she called out:

"Come—come quickly! If you do not there will be nothing left but emptiness."

Rose walked over to where Ilka was sitting.

"Ilka, I have found you out," she said abruptly. "It was not the hotel proprietor who sent—that," and she pointed to Benjie and his carriage. "I have found out who sent it. Why did you deceive me?"

Her eyes were sparkling, and the colour was coming and going in her cheeks.

Ilka popped a cherry into her mouth and laughed. She was not in the least abashed; she had been watching Rose's expression as she came up the steps and was prepared for what was coming. The time had arrived for her little intrigue to develop. She had come over to the Schloss bubbling with excitement, because she had just parted from Rudolf, and Rudolf had told her the story he had heard from Frau Wolff. Ilka was triumphant, for her belief in the Englishman was justified. She had known all along that he was sheltering some one, and to think that that some one was Vilma! Vilma! How she detested her! It gave her some satisfaction to think that

now she could detest her even more thoroughly than she had done before.

She popped another cherry into her mouth and laughed again. She was so jubilant she must laugh, and even if Rose were angry with her she could not help it.

"Ilka, Ilka, what have you been doing?" Rose's voice trembled with anger, and some other feeling, which she did not try to analyse.

Ilka jumped up and kissed her impulsively on both cheeks.

"They are so pink, just like the roses of your own name. And if I did not love you very much, I would be afraid of the thorns. You are angry with me. But why—why?"

"You know! Ilka, how could you? I am angry—I am very angry."

"Why?" repeated Ilka.

"Because—you know quite well." She glanced round, a new fear dawning upon her.

"Were there other things?"

Ilka's eyes danced.

"Heaps of other things—mountains of other things. So many that I cannot count them upon all my fingers together. It has been a great conspiracy; I do not think that I have ever conspired so beautifully in all my life before."

Rose sank down on a chair and gazed at her blankly.

"Do you mean to say that these rooms, and the things that I thought had been done for me by the hotel proprietor, have been——" She stopped.

"Yes," said Ilka unblushingly. "All—everything. The hotel proprietor! *Pouf!* He is nothing. He do what he is told." She raised her eyebrows expressively. "You have guessed? You know? To have such a friend is most noble, I think."

"Oh don't—please don't!" exclaimed Rose. She put her hands before her face. "Let me think. I can't take it all in. What shall I do?"

"But there is nothing to do, it is already done. What would you? The little one is now altogether well."

Rose dropped her hands; Ilka's words presented a new terror.

"The doctor?" she said, almost in a whisper. "Who was he? Where did he come from?"

"From Vienna. He is a most distinguished person." Ilka's voice softened. "And was it not right for him to come? At once the little one began to grow better."

Rose got up from her chair and walked

to the far end of the verandah. Movement was a necessity; she could not sit still. Ilka went on playing with the cherries. She understood quite well what Rose was feeling, and the kindest thing to do was to leave her alone.

Presently, as she expected, she came back and stood in front of her. No longer as pink as the roses of her own name; she was very white.

"Ilka, you don't know what you have done," she said in a low voice. "You don't know the circumstances, and I can't explain; but you have put me in a dreadful position. I can't take these things." Her voice quivered and she burst out passionately: "Why did you let him do it? It was not honourable of him to hide behind you."

Ilka's flippancy vanished. She caught Rose's hand and drew her down on a chair beside her. She did not speak just at once, then she said gravely:

"Herr Egerton is the most honourable gentleman I have ever met in all my life."

Rose tried to draw her hand away, but Ilka held it fast.

"Listen to me," she said, "and I will tell you why I say such a thing."

Then she told her. She did not try to plead Myles's cause: it did not seem to her that that was necessary. She told the story of Vilma's treachery, and she told it as briefly as she could. She knew it would be torture to Rose to listen, to hear what Vilma had done to the child. She was determined that Myles should be cleared, but it required an enormous effort to enable her to speak temperately. She almost choked over Vilma's name. She would like to have spat it out between her teeth like some noxious evil thing, but by a supreme effort she maintained her dignity to the end.

Rose sat perfectly still and listened. She did not interrupt or ask a single question. Even when Ilka had finished speaking she did not move, only her eyes went slowly to the place where Benjie was playing, and then back to Ilka's face.

There was a long silence, and then Ilka touched her hand.

"*Liebling*," she said softly.

Rose started. A wave of colour, hot and fierce, dyed her white cheeks. Her bosom rose and fell and the breath came in quick sobs through her parted lips. She rose to her feet and stood for a moment irresolute,

then she ran across to where the child was playing.

She caught him up, holding him tightly to her, murmuring his name, kissing his bewildered little face passionately.

He stroked her cheek. It was wet, and his lip trembled.

"Muvver," he cried, and threw his arms round her neck.

Ilka gathered her skirts together noiselessly and glanced backwards over her shoulder as she tiptoed across the verandah.

"It will now be all right," she said to herself smiling.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN THE KASTANIENWALD

ILKA was barely out of sight of the verandah when she met Rudolf. She had parted from him only a short time ago and he had told her then that he was to be very busy all evening.

"Where are you going?" she said. Brother and sister when they were alone together spoke in their native tongue.

He put his head on one side and looked at her. She knew Rudolf's ways very well. When he looked like that she was always suspicious.

"Where are you going?" she repeated.

"Have you told Frau Trevor about Vilma?" he asked.

"Yes, I have told her."

"Then I go to pay my adieus."

She slipped her arm through his and turned him round in the direction she was going

herself. She did not wish him to go and see Rose. She was not at all sure how far he was to be trusted.

Rudolf went with her unresistingly. He knew Ilka's ways quite as well as she knew his, and he was biding his time.

"Was she very much shocked?" he asked.

Ilka told him as much as she thought it was good for him to know. Then she went on to talk to him about himself with a gentle air of motherliness which he understood perfectly. He knew that she did not wish him to go and say good-bye to Rose, but he was quite determined to go. He had a reason. An odd, romantic, quixotic reason which had laid hold of his imagination.

He walked as far as the big door which led up to Ilka's rooms.

"Now I leave you. I go to say good-bye to Frau Trevor," he said.

Ilka twisted the fringe of his sword sash round her finger and tried to detain him.

"It is too late to pay calls on a lady," she said.

"It is never too late to be polite," he retorted. "I cannot go away without saying good-bye. She would think me very rude."

Ilka still held him.

"Promise me, then, that you will be good."

Rudolf shrugged his shoulders.

"How can I promise? If she smiles on me I will not remember whether I am good or bad."

Ilka twisted the fringe still tighter.

"Rudi," she said coaxingly, "I wish you to do something to please me. I am so sorry for this Englishman; he has behaved most honourably. Could you not say that you think he is a very noble man?"

"*Gott Himmel!* And cut my own throat?" Rudolf made a grimace. "It is too much."

"When your head is off already, what does it matter? Rudi, be good. That poor Englishman! He is as thin as needles. He will die of a consumption—and—she does not love you."

He twisted himself free and ran away from her before she could stop him.

He slackened his pace as he neared the Schloss, and considered what he ought to do. Whether to have himself announced formally, or risk no chance at all, but walk boldly up to the verandah and trust to finding Rose sitting there.

She saw him coming. She was alone, for Benjie had been taken off to bed. When he

saw her smile he wondered if he was brave enough to carry out his resolve.

But she, who was dreaming her own dreams, only saw that he walked lightly and carried his head high.

His first words reproached her as he bent low over her hand.

"I have come to say that word which in English I do not like—Good-bye," he said.

"Ah! I had forgotten!—I mean I am so sorry you are going away." In her contrition to make amends for having forgotten that he was going away she stumbled into the error of confessing it.

He looked at her wistfully. He felt that he would rather that she was not too kind. He had braced himself to make a great sacrifice—a great renunciation; but he loved her, and it was dangerous to play with fire.

He drew himself up.

"Yes. I come to say—good-bye. It is not an agreeable word."

"Then we will not say it," she answered quickly. "Your German way is so much prettier. *Auf Wiedersehen*—Till we meet again? I hope we shall meet again."

He did not echo the wish, which chilled her a little. Her conscience was still tender

whenever she thought of that night at Cortina.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "It is very good of you to find time to come and see me." She lowered her voice. "We must not speak loud. My little boy is being put to bed, and if he hears you he will want to run out and play with you."

"Ah—the little one. He is better? Well? I am glad."

Rudolf spoke with perfunctory politeness, and he made no attempt to take the chair which had been offered him. Rose felt more chilled, for Rudolf had seemed so fond of the child, and yet he did not appear interested when she mentioned his name. But she wanted to be kind, so she asked him again if he would not sit down.

Rudolf looked at the chair, and then at her.

"Will you make a little walk with me?" he said.

The perfunctory manner vanished, and he waited anxiously for her answer.

"A walk?"

"It is a most pleasant evening. I think it would be very agreeable to make a little walk in the Kastanienwald."

"I don't know," she answered doubtfully. "I never go far away—now."

"But we will not go far away. *Liebe Frau*, to-morrow I depart. Will you not give me the last favour I ask of you?"

She could not be so ungracious as to refuse. He might think that she did not trust him. She did trust him, and she wished to show him that she did.

"I will come," she said. "One minute. I must tell Leopoldina where I have gone," and she left him.

Rudolf gave a deep sigh. "I find it very difficult to be good," he murmured, and his hand went to the breast of his tunic, feeling for something which lay hidden there.

When Rose appeared again she carried a sunshade in her hand, but she had not put on a hat. It had been a scorching hot day, and a faint breeze had come up with the lengthening shadows.

"I don't really want any shade," she said. "The sun will have gone down in a few minutes."

Rudolf agreed with her politely. He walked alongside, but not very near, and he made conversation. She wished he would be his own natural self. Perhaps it was only

his anxiety to show her respect that made him behave so oddly; and thinking this she redoubled her efforts to be kind.

When they came to the Kastanienwald they walked on as far as the Shrine which she had been accustomed to pass so often in her evening rambles. Beyond it was a wooden bench propped against the stem of a giant chestnut tree, and Rudolf suggested that they should sit down. The turf about their feet sent out a delicious aromatic perfume; it was powdered with tiny white flowers, which were softly closing their petals for the night. The forest was very still, and between the gnarled old branches of the trees could be seen glimpses of the valley below, meadows heaped with long lines of new-mown hay, and orchards bathed in the mellow light of the setting sun.

"It is most beautiful—most *poétique*," said Rudolf; and then he began to talk about squirrels!

A squirrel had run along a bough of the tree under which they were sitting. It skipped from branch to branch, and then sat peeping down at them, a little brown splash of colour amongst the green.

"Do you see him?" he whispered. "I will catch him."

Rose shook her head.

"No," she whispered back. "There! He has gone already."

Rudolf held up his finger.

"Do not move. Do not turn your head. I will show you that I catch him." And treading cautiously he crept round to the back of the tree.

His feet sank into the mossy turf and made no sound. She waited for a few minutes, and then called softly:

"Have you caught him?"

No answer came back, and she called again, but still there was silence. She heard a rustling in the leaves overhead, and the squirrel popped out again. The whole of his brown body was visible; no one was attempting to catch him, and he knew it.

Rose stretched round until she could see quite behind the tree stem. Rudolf had vanished.

She got up and walked this way and that, thinking he might be hiding behind some of the other trees, until she found herself at the entrance to the Shrine. She looked inside and stood in the archway for a few minutes listening, but there was neither sight nor sound of him. The forest seemed quieter

than ever: the leaves hung motionless in the still air: everywhere there breathed out a languorous, drowsy sweetness; Nature's last sigh for the passing of another day.

She lingered; the peace and fragrance held her. For a whole week she had hardly been beyond the limits of the verandah, and here it was so cool and quiet; a little mysterious where the long green glades melted into the grey distance.

She had almost forgotten Rudolf. A church bell striking the hour roused her; it was later than she thought, and she must go back. She could not understand Rudolf at all, for it did not seem to her a very appropriate time to play hide and seek. It showed what a boy he was to do such a thing, and she felt she ought to be glad, but was conscious of disappointment. Perhaps he would take her by surprise on her way back. Then she remembered that she had left her sunshade lying on the bench, and she retraced her steps.

The sunshade was not where she had left it. It was standing upright, with the point stuck into the ground, and something small and white rested on the handle. It was just as though a white bird had fluttered down from a branch and lighted there. She touched

the thing curiously. It fell on the carpet of moss amongst the sleepy flowers, and she saw what it was. It was her own handkerchief: the little white swan which Rudolf had made for his Lohengrin the day of the picnic.

How young he was, she thought again, and smiled. He was probably watching her, and in another minute she would hear his boyish laugh and see him spring out from some hiding-place.

Then she saw that a scrap of paper was twisted into one of the folds of the handkerchief. She took it out and opened it. One word was written across it:

"Good-bye."

A lump rose in her throat; it was not a joke at all. It was something infinitely pathetic; something which stabbed her and hurt her and made her heart ache for Rudolf. She understood what he meant as clearly as though he had told her.

"Good-bye." That was why he had not echoed her "*Auf Wiedersehen.*" She had wondered at the time. There was to be no "Till we meet again." He meant it to be "Good-bye." He wanted to try and forget her, and to make his forgetting complete he

had given her back the little white swan—his *gage d'amour*, he had laughingly called it.

The scene in the restaurant on the day of the picnic came back to her. The low-panelled room and the applauding crowd, gaily indifferent to the crash of the thunder and the lightning's glare. She could see him now standing up in that absurd old tub, with the wine-cooler on his head and the sheet thrown over his shoulders, singing his impromptu recitative of nonsense. She had forgotten about the handkerchief, but he had treasured it. The folds were tightly pressed. It had lain inside the breast of Rudolf's tunic ever since the day it had come into his possession.

Poor little swan! She touched it tenderly and the tears brimmed up to her eyes. They blurred her sight, and she did not see that some one was coming down the woodland path, and she sat so still that Myles was quite close to her before he was conscious of her nearness. The light under the tree was shadowy, but the white of her gown against the stem revealed her. He saw her put up her hand and draw it across her eyes. Something glistened. He was so near he could see that and, instead of passing on, he hesitated. The fraction of

a moment did it, because she looked up and saw him.

He did not know what to expect. Some kind of recognition, for he did not think she would ignore him entirely. His first intention had been to pass on, and not give her the pain of having to recognise him; his second was a more selfish one. He must know what her feeling was towards him, so he stood still and waited.

He saw her leave the bench and come across the grass towards him. The blood rushed up to his head and everything seemed to spin round and then stand still with a jerk. He saw nothing but her face. The background was a blank from which it stood out very white, and her eyes looked big and dark and frightened.

Rose did not know herself what she was going to do; she had not given herself time to think. She was standing in front of him before she realised where she was. He had looked as though he were going to pass on, and she could not let him do that. She must speak to him. She must tell him that she knew what he had done, and that she knew about Vilma.

Her extreme nervousness was very apparent,

and Myles did not help her. That tell-tale colour, which had such a maddening trick of coming and going in her cheeks, was playing havoc with his self-control. When she looked like that, and her eyes grew big and dark like a frightened child's, he was conscious of nothing but an overpowering desire to take her in his arms.

She was speaking, but in her nervousness she did not make her meaning plain. He did not understand at first; then the truth flashed upon him. She had found him out. Of course he had always known that she would. It was only a question of time. What would she do?

He did not realise how difficult it was for her to speak, and when she stopped because she could not trust her voice further, he misunderstood. He said rather lamely:

"I knew you would be angry."

"Angry?" She was explaining very badly. She must make him understand. The words came out spasmodically, and to her own ears they sounded miserably stiff. "You have laid me under a great debt of gratitude. You have been very kind. I wished to thank you. You wanted to help me, but—but—I cannot accept— Oh! don't you see the impossibility of it?"

He was beginning to understand.

"No, I don't see the impossibility. It was quite right for me to do what I did. I was to blame. It was my fault."

"It was not your fault."

"But it was. Don't you remember? I told you I was to blame."

He was groping in the dark, still uncertain how much she knew.

"Don't pretend," she exclaimed vehemently. "It has been all pretence and hiding and keeping things from me. Why have you all treated me as if I were a child? Please don't do it any more. Did you think that I could not bear to be told the truth? Would you have let me believe a lie about you always?"

He had nothing to say.

She shuddered and shut her eyes, as though she would blot out some horrid vision.

"Can that woman ever be forgiven for such cruelty?—and to a little child," she murmured.

He could not trust himself to speak of Vilma. She saw that he could not when she looked up at him.

"You saved him. I am very grateful," she said.

"And yet—you will not take anything from me?"

He had not intended to answer harshly. The moment the words were spoken he was sorry.

Her lip trembled.

"It is the kind of pride a woman must have. She can't—accept things."

"That old bit of conventionalism? Can't we rise above it? You—and I?" His voice changed on the last words. Passion, and an infinite tenderness, vibrated in its deep tone. "You—and I— That night when you came back, what answer were you going to give me?"

She looked at him for a moment, and then her eyes fell.

"Had you made up your mind what you were going to say?"

He thought she was never going to answer.

"Yes," she murmured at last.

"Was it the answer I was waiting for?"

She did not speak, but she did not draw away from him. He knew she was his. He felt it pulsing through every vein.

He laid his hands on her shoulders and she quivered under his touch.

"Rose. Look at me—tell me? Do you love me?"

She swayed a little. Her hand went out with a fluttering movement. It touched the breast of his coat.

"You do not want an answer. You—you know."

At last!

He caught her in his arms. They were not light kisses that rained on her lips and eyes and brow. But he did not know what he was doing—only—that she was his.

With a tremulous laugh she put up her hand to smooth her ruffled hair and held him from her.

He tried to draw her back, but she resisted.

"Be a little kind to me," he pleaded. "I 've gone through such a bad time. I thought I had lost you."

A troubled expression crossed her face. The lover in him resented it.

"Why do you look like that?" he said. "What does it mean?"

"It means—" She hesitated. "It means that I still feel the same about what you call my pride. About—about all these things you have done for me."

He laughed.

"I gave all the orders in your name," he said.

"How? How could you give orders in my name?"

He touched a little curl of hair which clung to the rim of her ear, and it twisted round his finger.

"My dear," he said tenderly, "let us talk this out once for all, and never speak of it again. We will go back. Before I left England to come out here I went to see old Mr. Trevor's lawyers. I told them everything, and I left instructions with them as to what they were to do to insure the boy's rights being legalised as soon as they heard from me that I had found him.

"I wrote to them from Waldhof. It was the day after the picnic. Do you remember we talked on the way up? I wanted to get the business settled and they seemed very slow, so when you were at Cortina I telegraphed to them. They answered, and I had to wire final instructions. It was important, and I went down to the office myself to send the wire."

She glanced up.

"You went with the Seybells?"

"Yes."

She blushed hotly.

"I hated your going with them."

"Did you?"

The little curl twisted tighter round his finger.

"But still I don't understand," she said.

"Have I not made it clear? You have only been spending on the boy what was his own. It has all been made over to him. Now, do you understand?"

She looked at him long and questioningly.

"I said I would never take that old man's money."

He put his arm round her and drew her down on the old wooden bench.

"Do you think you have the right to keep the boy out of it?"

She sat with downcast eyes, still troubled.

"It comes to him from you—now? Not from that old man?"

"Does that make it easier?"

"Yes."

A woman's logic, but he loved her for it.

They sat for a long time under the chestnut tree. The little brown squirrel in the branches overhead watched, and perhaps listened; but he could not have heard very much, for there is a stage of happiness when words count for nothing.

The dusk of the summer night fell softly.

The silent sweetness of the forest encircled them.

"It is late; I must not stay." Rose had said that many times, and he had always answered: "I cannot let you go. Nothing will ever be quite the same as this again."

When she would no longer be persuaded he rose reluctantly. Something fell from her lap to the ground.

"Your handkerchief," he said, and, stooping, picked it up and gave it to her.

Poor little white swan! She had twisted it round and round in her fingers, not knowing what she did. She had been so happy that she had forgotten all about it, and she had forgotten Rudolf. She felt pitiful and remorseful.

"Why do you sigh like that?"

Her fingers closed over the handkerchief.

"Why?" he repeated.

"It was an accident our meeting in the wood just now? Only chance, was n't it?" she asked.

"Almost too good for chance," he answered.

"But you did not expect to meet me? You did not know I was here?"

"No; I had not the least idea I was going to meet you."

She drew a little nearer to him. Even in the faint light he could see that her eyes were shining as if through tears. She put her hand on his shoulder and laid her cheek against it.

He did not move. She was so chary of her caresses that he was afraid of frightening the sweetness of her mood.

"What is it?" he asked.

She did not answer for a moment; then she said slowly:

"I don't think it was an accident. I think it was meant."

"Who meant it?"

She slipped her hand a little higher. It touched his cheek

He bent and kissed her.

"Some day perhaps I will tell you."

THE END

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